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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

COMMITTED TO LOVE: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ADOPTING A ROMANIAN CHILD

BY

SANDRA E. BRENNEIS

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION.

IN

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

Department of EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled COMMITTED TO LOVE: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ADOPTING A ROMANIAN CHILD submitted by SANDRA E. BRENNEIS in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION in SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY.

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Janis Blakey
Dr. Janis Blakey

Date January 18, 1993

Dedication

To all the parents who adopted children from Romania. Thank you for your lessons in courage, faith, commitment and love.

And most of all to the those parents in Romania who loved their children enough to let them go.

ABSTRACT

Romanian adoptions have received a great deal of attention in the last few years and there has been much speculation as to the likelihood of success for the adoptive parents and children. These children who have most often come from institutional backgrounds exhibit several behaviors which are unfamiliar to Canadian parents, and have become the focus of much public attention. There has been some misunderstanding surrounding this experience of adoption which has lead to assumptions about what the adoptive families experience and need during the process.

The experience of adopting a Romanian child has been explored through the perspective of the adoptive parents. Using a phenomenological perspective, an understanding of the experience was developed through the use of in depth interviews. The interviews were considered first independently of each other, then in comparison to each other and the common themes emerged. Three separate stages of the adoptive process were identified. The Decision to Adopt was the first stage of the process and themes of 1. Frustration and Uncertainty, 2. Hope, and 3. God and Faith emerged. The Journey describes the experience of travelling to Romania to pursue the adoption and has been divided into themes of 1. Living the Culture and 2. Loss. The third stage describes the Adjustment period of adoption as one of 1. Chaos, 2. Coping, 3. Unexpected Feelings, and 4. Optimism for the Future. By listening to the people directly involved,

speculation of future possibilities may be more accurate and founded. Perhaps what is learned and heard now, will be of use in establishing systems of support in the future.

Acknowledgement

I can't possibly thank everyone who was a part of this process. I am truly very lucky to have so many wonderful people in my life. My heart felt thanks to Dr. Fred Boersma who encouraged me to pursue this fascinating topic and for constantly reminding me that the process would indeed happen. And to Mary Ann Bibby who welcomed me into my first experience of Qualitative Research with the support and knowledge I needed to persevere.

To those of you who have been my undying moral supporters I give my love and thanks to: Linda for being one step ahead of me and so generous in sharing your experience of the process; Shaunee for the coffee break calls which energized and enlightened me; Rose for transcribing hours of interviews; Colleen for proof reading again and again, and to the rest of my family who had to listen to all the complaints and excitement along the way.

But most of all there are six very special people without whom I could have never made it through.

Thanks and love to Mom and Dad for teaching me to love myself and believe in myself enough to follow my dreams, for the constant encouragement to finish, and most of all for loving my children when I wasn't around; to Mom Brenneis for all the days in my home and with my family doing things that needed to be done especially loving and laughing with my

children; and to Kessia, Tyler, and Travis who have given me the most wonderful gift I'll ever know, that of being a mother. I love you.

And finally to you Ryan. Thanks for staying by me, encouraging me and continuing to love me always. You are the best and I love you.

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I. The Beginning

> Life is short. We do not have much time for gladdening the hearts of those who are travelling the darkened way with us. Oh, be swift to love. Make haste to be kind.
> - Henri Amiel

As a parent I have always been astounded by the unconditional love I feel for my children. Though sometimes overwhelming and frightening, this love has been the incredible force that carries me through days when I question the wisdom of my choice to have children. Before I married and had children I used to think I knew how very tired a body could get. Now eight years later I have been pushed beyond the bounds of sleeplessness, and somehow continue to find the energy and even some creativity necessary to nurture my children and marriage. Surprisingly enough I am not bothered by the lack of sleep and freedom. The gifts of parenthood greatly outweigh the pains, sorrows and frustrations.

My road to parenthood however was rather easy, and I am not faced with the incredible challenges of parenting an adopted child or a child who needs special physical or psychological care. I am able to draw on the example of other parents around me whose circumstance of becoming parents is similar to my own. How would my experience of parenting be different if I was faced with the complexities of adopting a child and if that child was to exhibit behaviors I had never before encountered as a parent?

Would my decision to love be enough to provide the fortitude necessary to meet the challenge? Do I have what it takes to nurture a child and love a child who I may not even like, or who makes me feel inadequate?

I doubt that I will ever be able to answer these questions unless I find myself within the adoption experience first hand as an adoptive parent, but thanks to four very courageous and honest adoptive parents I have been given a glimpse into the world of parenting an adopted Romanian child. I was astounded by the beauty and pain of the experience, but most of all I was impressed beyond words by their commitment to love children who need to be unconditionally loved. In a world where parenthood is often unvalued and unappreciated, these four parents have chosen to nurture and love those whom others have left behind.

This is their story, their experience of adopting a Romanian child, with all its pains and joys. And with it is my story. A story of learning from research and books, and most importantly from life and those who have lived it.

II. Review of the Literature: What we Know

After reviewing the literature and recent research on adoption one conclusion is clear, there is an enormous need for more research in the area of adoption providing a basis for a deeper understanding of the experience. Parents who might be considering adoption would be overwhelmed and confused by the body of literature which is contradictory in its findings. For every argument in favor of a position or assumption concerning the adoption experience there is another diametrically opposed, which is supported with equally valid research. In part this is due to the quantitative approach taken in studying adoption and using the findings to formulate very "life orientated" conclusions. When studying adopted children and parents' experiences it is difficult to find a control group for a basis of comparison. Variables such as age, sibling number, previous life experience, education levels and family dynamics all influence the success or disruption of adoption, therefore it is difficult to attribute findings to the adoption experience alone. This is not to deny the value of such studies, but instead to recognize the need for a more qualitative approach in researching the adoption experience.

The realm of adoption is far reaching and encompasses issues related to attachment, loss, family systems, self acceptance, support programs, infertility, and foster and institutional care, just to mention a few. Due to the

enormity and number of these issues researchers have attempted to study pieces of the adoption puzzle and are just beginning to develop programs which implement several of the findings. With any type of family issue it becomes difficult to recognize the factors which are the cause of overall difficulties or success. Which came first the adoption or the family issue? Is the adopted child the cause of family crisis or the scapegoat? Questions such as these are impossible to answer.

Since there is little research on the Romanian adoption experience, conclusions have been drawn from other areas of research related to specific elements of this experience. Firstly a discussion of adoption as a viable and potentially successful alternative for child care is necessary. Institutional living as a means of foster care and intercountry adoption are examined in terms of the benefits and risks to the abandoned child. Those factors which are most likely to lead to adoption disruption are identified.

The second most studied aspect of this area is the attachment and loss process experienced by those involved. For my purposes, the perspective of the adoptive parent and adopted child is considered. Related to this is a discussion of a family systems approach used in therapy to improve family unity and attachments.

The final review of findings is related to those studies which are qualitative or which are specifically

based on the study of children adopted from Romanian institutions. What follows presents a description of what research has been done and what we assume we know about adoption.

A. Adoption as an Alternative

Extensive research has been done on the adverse effects of environmental deprivation which occurs in large, poorly funded institutionalized child care (Dennis & Najarian, 1957; Dennis 1960, 1973, 1976; Tizard & Hodges, 1978; Lizano, 1982; Mukhina, 1989.) Commonly referred to as orphanages, these institutions are generally filled with children who have been abandoned rather than orphaned. Some of the birth parents relinquish their children for what they believe will be a temporary period, hoping for a day when circumstances will allow them to return and claim their child.

In the interim, the children institutionalized in impoverished countries are housed in facilities in which the worker to child ratio is at best 1:10 (Boostani &Tashakkori, 1984). Limited by physical and financial restraints, these workers are forced to concern themselves only with the children's primary needs of food, shelter and clothing (Lizano, 1982). The effects of such care have been identified as at least two fold. Physical and developmental delays are extreme and studies indicate that the longer a child remains in the institution the greater

the delay in comparison to those children living as a member of a family (Tizard & Rees, 1970; Boostani & Tashakkori, 1982; Ames, Carter, Chisholm, Fisher, Gilman, Mainemer, McMullan & Savoie, 1992). The retardation of the institutionalized children is to some degree reversible when removed from the environment with the most success for younger children (Dennis, 1960; Hunt, Mohandessi, Godssi, & Akiyamaet, 1976; Rutter, 1979; Ames et al., 1992).

Secondly, the psychological development of institutionalized children is effected. Cristina Zeledon Lizano (1982) identifies the new challenge for doctors and administrators is based on the discovery that "all institutionalized children without exception suffer from psychological disturbances and show signs of being asocial, delinquent, psychotic or just generally `problem children'" (p. 24). She concludes from her studies of institutions in Costa Rica that placement in institutions should be only an interim measure (1982). Studies of Russian institutionalized children come to a similar conclusion stating that "continuous living by children in a large group of coevals exhausts their nervous system, which subsequently results in more serious mental disorders (Mukhina, 1989, p. 283). These children are alienated from people and those dynamics which operate within a family, leaving them void of knowledge and understanding regarding the social and emotional expectations of family life. Upon entering a family setting these children need to be taught

appropriate behaviors beyond the passivity or aggression they previously exhibited in the orphanage (Ames et al., 1992). Clearly institutionalization of abandoned or orphaned children has proven to be ineffective in meeting any need other than merely physical survival. In light of this, adoption appears to provide a more promising future for these children.

It is believed that the best place for a child is with their biological family, when that family provides a loving and safe environment. Frequently this is not the case and children are removed from their homes and, in North America, placed with a foster family. When the birth parents relinquish all parental rights it is believed that adoption within the child's own culture and country is the most preferable alternative. Following adoption, the majority of adoptive families and adoptees recognize satisfaction with the adoptive environment (Pierce, 1984). With regard to the physical and developmental needs of children, it is clear that the adoptive parents are generally well educated and highly motivated to care for an adopted child. They are successful in meeting the child's physical, developmental and educational needs (Tizard & Hodges, 1978). Adoption appears to be preferable to remaining in a severely dysfunctional family or institutionalization.

With respect to psychological development, there remains extensive debate as to whether or not there is a

greater clinical population of adoptees over non-adoptees. At present there are roughly an equal number of studies supporting either side of this argument (Pierce, 1984; Brinich & Brinich, 1982). However it should be noted that there is great variety of sample groups in the varying studies, with very few studies focusing on the adult adoptee and most considering the adopted child or teenager. The increase in numbers of adoptees who seek psychological aid may be due in part to age, socioeconomic status of the adoptive families and follow up services provided by adoption agencies (Brinich & Brinich, 1982). No clear conclusions can be drawn about the overall long term effects of adoption on a child's psychological development. This reflects a need for better understanding of the experience and needs of adoptees and adoptive parents rather than identifying adoption as a dismal choice for unwanted or orphaned children.

Not all research supports the premise that adoption is a preferable alternative. Those children with extreme mental, physical and emotional problems have proven to adjust better to group home settings which provide the extra attention and support required, rather than placement within an adoptive family (Barth et al., 1988). Overall Tizard and her associates found that preschool institutionalized children did best when adopted, followed by those who remained in institutions and the least

successful were those who returned home (Tizard & Hodges, 1975; Tizard & Rees, 1970, 1974).

International adoption and interracial adoption is a very controversial issue with research recognizing both positive and adverse effects. Arguments against this type of adoption are generally focused on the loss of culture identity for the child and issues of racism (Ngabonziza, 1988). The fundamental argument for intercountry adoption is that it meets the needs of both childless couples and abandoned children (Tizard, 1991). It is only in the last thirty years that international or interracial adoption has become popular and gained social acceptance. This trend followed the second world war in which orphaned children were sought by adoptive parents from other countries. More recently the number of adoptable children has decreased in wealthier nations due to the acceptability of single parenthood and the legalization of abortion (Leete, 1978 . The result is prospective adoptive parents actively seeking adoptable children of other countries and cultures in response to issues of infertility and humanitarian efforts. As of yet there is very little information on the likelihood of success for international adoption. What little there is recognizes 75-80% success rate for internationally adoptive families (Tizard, 1991). An adoption is considered to be successful when it does not end in disruption.

The success of adoption has been influenced by several factors and numerous studies have been done attempting to isolate the effect of one factor over another. Of greatest influence was the age of the child at adoption, the younger the child the more likely the adoption is to succeed (Boyne et al., 1971). Other factors which increase the likelihood of disruption are previous physical abuse of the child (Kagan & Reid, 1986) behavior problems (Barth et al., 1988) previously disrupted placements (Donley, 1983), court actions to terminate biological parental rights (Borgman, 1981), and lack of self acceptance of adoptive parents (Digiulio, 1988).

Rather than recognize the evils or virtues of adoption it may be better to come to the following conclusions when reviewing the literature. The best place for a child is first with their biological parents in a safe and loving environment, secondly with a loving adoptive family of the same culture and country and thirdly with a loving family of another culture or country. The least preferable solution is to place an abandoned child in an impoverished institution where many of the freedoms and dignities which make us human are unavailable.

B. Loss and Attachment

There are several losses involved in the adoptive process. For the adopted parents there are issues of infertility which result in profound feelings of loss

(Anthony et al., 1989). Following the adoption, infertile couples may believe they are truly not entitled to a child and therefore must be perfect parents and are not allowed to complain about difficulties (Berman & Bufferd, 1986). They may begin to develop a sense of insecurity related to their decision and their abilities which is reinforced by the continual evaluations and involvement of the adoption agencies (Ward, 1981). Fantasies about the nature of a biological child in comparison to an adopted child evoke a new sense of loss for parents intensifying physical and behavioral differences between the adopted child and parent (Berman & Bufferd, 1986).

From the child's perspective the loss of the biological parent is most significant. During adolescence and the period of identity formation the adopted child has no frame of reference with which to measure physical changes. The adoption may be seen as the rejection by the birth parents, and may be manifested in psychosomatic symptoms, depression, phobias or detachment (Kagan & Reid, 1986). Adopted children may also have learning disabilities, (Lifton, 1979) which are in part believed to be a result of the "implicit prohibitions against questioning or delving deeply into unknowns" (Berman & Bufferd, 1986). The losses experienced are numerous and the assumption is that there will be difficulty forming new attachments if previous losses have not been adequately mourned.

The necessity for grief work is based on Bowlby's work in which he concluded that children must resolve old ties through a grieving process before they will be free to develop new attachments (Bowlby, 1980). Other research, however, suggests that children can maintain previous ties and still develop new and successful attachments (Robertson & Robertson, 1971; Wallerstein, 1983). Again the process of attachment formation for adopted children is unclear and debate exists as to the needs of adopted children and parents. It is clear that if a child or adoptive parent is focused on a loss, rather than being oriented to the development of a new attachment, the adoption process is not likely to succeed.

Aside from the loss issue, there is speculation that the parent-child bond of an adopted child is not as intense or secure as with a birth parent and child (Klaus & Kennell, 1976) simply because the adopted mother was not present in the first few hours of the child's life. As well, the process of giving birth is now believed to contribute to those intense feelings of attachment for the mother and child (Benedek, 1980). Obviously the adoptive parent and child do not share the birth and post delivery bonding process and might not benefit from the enhancement of attachment based solely on this experience. However, Schaffer (1977) states: "The notion that the biological mother, by virtue of being the biological mother, is uniquely capable of caring for her child is without

foundation"(p.76). As well the belief that adoptive parents are somehow incapable of forming secure and positive attachments due to the lack of involvement in the birth experience and lack or early contact is clearly unfounded (Singer et al., 1985).

There are some factors however which do affect both the adoptive parent's and adopted child's ability to develop attachments. The later a child is adopted, and the number of previous placements, adversely affect the child's ability to bond (Deering & Scahill, 1989; Murray, 1984). Unanswered questions for parents about their adoptive child's history are a source of great stress and frequently become an issue when crisis arises (Talen & Lehr, 1984; Deering & Scahill, 1989). Overall there is little evidence to suggest that there is any difference between the attachment of adoptive and non-adoptive mother-infant pairs (Singer et al., 1985). However, difficulties in adoption usually occur later on when a child develops some understanding of adoption (Talen & Lehr, 1984). Adoptive parents are faced with difficult questions related to love abandonment and identity and must provide children with satisfactory answers.

Recent research and practice are based on the family systems approach to adoption. The success or disruption is most importantly based on the family system itself and how the issue of adoption is dealt with. The task of the adoptive family is to incorporate the adopted child into

the family without denying the child's unique history (Elbow, 1986). This is a very complex and difficult task. Adoptive parents receive all types of contradictory advice ranging from the benefits of avoiding the topic of adoption until confronted by the child (Donovan, 1990), to encouraging parents to continuously refer to the child as "our adopted child" making the adoption appear as natural as possible (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1985). The basis for either approach is related to the need to develop a sense of security for the child while aiding in the recognition of a unique identity in order to come to successful differentiation and independence from the family (Kraft et al., 1985). Regardless of the personal biases held in dealing with adoption one conclusion is clear; adoptive children should be dealt with in an honest, healthy and sensitive manner with the greatest respect given to the uniqueness of each child and each situation (Demick & Wapner, 1988).

One final point which is presently receiving great attention with respect to the success of adoption is the increased risk for an adopted child to become singled out as the focus of the families difficulties.

> She is at greater risk of becoming symptomatic because she is easily identified as different from the rest of the family. Her behaviors and developmental changes have different meaning to the family and are more likely to be perceived as problematic than are the behaviors or developmental changes of other family members. Her differentness, therefore, makes the adopted child more susceptible to assuming the role of

> symptom bearer in the family and overtly displaying the family stress. (Talen & Lehr, 1984, p.383)

There is agreement on this point and therefore much of the approach presently accepted in working with adoptive families is based on recognizing the need of the entire family especially those which may not be related at all to the adoption.

C. Other Qualitative Studies on Adoption

In my review of the literature I came across only two other studies on adoption which were qualitative in approach. The first was a study of parents' view of adoption disruption based on exploratory semi-structured interviews with twelve couples and three single parents and six themes from the interviews were developed. Schmidt, Rosenthal and Bombeck (1988) describe the dominant theme as the inability of the child to attach to the adoptive family. The other five themes focused on the inability of the child to let go of their birth family, parents' expectation of a less difficult child, unresolved infertility issues, lack of information regarding the adopted child's history, and finally the importance of worker expertise and support.

The second study examined "adoptive parenting and tne norm of family emotionality" (Hoffmann-Riem, 1986, p. 162). The question she put to adoptive parents was "Can you still remember what it was like when you applied for a child?"

From this point she used the narrative interview approach in which she allowed the parents to describe their stories without interruption and when complete she would question the parents attempting to elicit more information. Hoffmann-Riem suggests that the experience for parents is related to the concept of constructing normality. Her research divides this process into three separate areas related to the age of the child at adoption, whether an infant, toddler or an older child. Though the work for parents is different for each age of development, the process of establishing emotional normality is the focus. Parents strive to establish what they see as a "normal" attachment relationship with their adopted child, and a day in which the distinction of adoption no longer seems relevant.

D. Study of Romanian Adoption

In 1992 a group of researchers from Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, studied 48 families who have adopted Romanian children. Lead by Elinor Ames they examined three areas of the adoption and children. First the developmental progress of Romanian orphanage children living in Canada was examined (McMullan & Fisher, 1992). Four areas of development were assessed: fine motor and adaptive skills, gross motor development, personal-social skills, and language development. They found that at the time of adoption 74% of the children were delayed in all

four of the areas, 18% had three delays and 8% had only two delays. However the progress made by these children after spending a mean time period of 13 months with their adoptive families was notable. Delays in three or four of the areas were had by 45% of the children, 36% had one or two delays and 19% were no longer delayed in any area. The factor which had the largest affect on progress was the age of the child at adoption and number of years spent in an institutions. The younger adopted children appeared to make faster progress.

The second area studied was the behavior and attachment problems of Romanian orphanage children adopted to Canada (Chisholm & Savoie, 1992). Although all of the parents reported their child exhibited behavior problems, none of the parents consider the difficulties as pathological or in need of clinical intervention. The researchers go on to describe the types frequency of behaviors among the participants. In order of severity as rated by the parents the behaviors are as follows: rocking, watching of hands, inability to eat solid foods and eating too much and not knowing when to stop. Other behaviors described included the child not reporting when he or she experiences pain, lying quietly and not calling or signaling when awake and thumb sucking. With respect to the rocking behaviors, 39% of parents have seen some improvement while 39% note the problem as being completly resolved. Resolution of eating problems have been made for

29% of children. Overall, parents report that there has been marked improvement in behavior that causes concern.

The parents were also asked to respond to 23 items of the Waters and Deane Attachment Q-sort (1985) which assesses attachment behaviors and security levels of children. What was concluded was that the children fell in two groups of attachment behaviors. The first, who exhibited indiscriminate friendliness also scored high on attachment security items. Researchers concluded that the children were treating all adults in the same manner, therefore not exhibiting the discriminating bond to a specific other which defines attachment. The second group of children exhibited ambivalent attachment behaviors characterized by ambivalence toward a care giver when distressed. Researchers, however, found that there is a positive relationship between the children's attachment scores and the length of time they have been with their families. Such findings would suggest that attachments are developing and with time the children will exhibit less behavior that reflects ambivalence and lack of attachment.

The final portion of the British Columbia study is based on the experiences of the Canadian parents adopting children from Romanian orphanages (Mainemer & Gilman, 1992). This quantitative research focused on the preadoptive experience and the stress following the adoption. It is useful in describing with statistics the group of people who adopt from Romania and the most common

difficulties experienced following their return home. Seventy percent of the adoptive parents interviewed pursued Romanian adoption due to fertility problems, 67% because of the availability of children, and 61% went for humanitarian reasons, with 21% going for humanitarian reasons alone. Most often only one parent went to Romania, staying there four to six weeks at a cost of about $7,000 dollars. Most parents had little time to spend with the adopted child while in Romania and 52% of the parents met at least one of the child's biological parents. When in Romania most parents were not prepared for the poverty, bureaucratic difficulties and uncleanliness of the country, and they experienced a great deal of stress as a result. The necessity of visiting several institutions substantially added to their overall stress.

Upon returning home parents were generally not prepared for the type of problems the child had. Eighty-two percent of the children had some health problem greater than the usual respiratory or ear problems. Along with the previously mentioned developmental, behavior and attachment difficulties the parents experienced great stress following the adoption. However, the heightened level of stress experienced, as measured by the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1990), was not outside of the normal range and below the clinical cutoff. Although the process of adoption is incredibly stressful, the parents do not view it as being one in which they would require clinical

intervention. The study concludes by recognizing that most parents were happy with their decision to adopt and even knowing what they know now about the process would still have adopted from Romania, but might have done things differently.

II. MY PROCESS

The methods used in this research were truly part of an evolving process rather than a prescribed format which was followed. I had initially set out with a specific and definite plan of action but found that throughout the process of this research the plan continued to take on a personality of its own and I became as much a part of the research as I was in control of it. The following description of methodology is my account of living through the experience of qualitative research.

A. Choice of Paradigm

A desire to understand, and almost vicariously live someone else's experience, was the motivating factor behind this research. I was intrigued by Romanian adoption and those parents who pursued it. The qualitative research paradigm allowed for an opportunity to ask questions about the experience and, more importantly, to seek the kinds of answers I desired.

> Quality refers to the what, how, when, and where of a thing-its essence and ambience. Qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things. (Berg, 1989, p. 2)

Qualitative research can be real, meaningful and enlightening; it provides a basis for understanding on a level which examines the whole and its parts, rather than the parts of a whole. Using the premise of the qualitative

paradigm, the research question "What is the experience of adopting a Romanian child?" evolved.

B. The Perspective: Descriptive Phenomenology

I am inspired by the power of the story and the beauty with which people tell it. It is because of this that I did not want to take apart, or put form onto this experience. In my own personal need to respect these stories I have chosen a phenomenological perspective from which to describe them. "Phenomenology is more of an orientation than a specific method" (Osborne, 1989 p. 11). One of the fundamental principles of this perspective is that people exist of the world rather than in it and therefore create a reality which is interdependent upon both self and the world. This is of specific importance to the Romanian Adoption research question because the reality for parents encompasses several cultural, economic, social and moral issues which make up the entire complex experience. Furthermore, the role of the parent throughout the experience is one that evolves and might consequently raise questions of, "Who exactly am I as a part of this experience and what is my reality?"

It has been said that the best instructor is life and quite simply I have asked those who have lived to teach me. Max van Manen (1984) describes four characteristics of phenomenological research which provided a basis for my understanding of this perspective. Phenomenological

research is the study of lived experience, the study of essences, the attentive practice of thoughtfulness and is a poetizing activity.

Several questions arose during my consideration of the topic. "What is the experience of adopting a Romanian child? How was it lived? What made it unique? How is this life pervading decision and action being handled on a daily basis? Has it inspired or destroyed what was within parents before? Could I touch that intimate piece of parents lives and glean from it their thoughtfulness, pain, joy and insight; truly their story? Will I find the appropriate words to convey this essence, this experience to others who pursue understanding? The challenge of understanding and answering these unending questions was met by the phenomenological descriptive approach. The task was to "let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (Heidegger, 1962 p. 58).

Perhaps the clearest manner in which to describe the phenomenological perspective is through relating the experience of this research within the phenomenological framework. The question itself "What is the experience of adopting a Romanian child?" reflects consideration of a lived experience. I have asked the participants to share their stories in my own attempt to glimpse at this part of their lives. The very nature of the question elicits the need for a phenomenological approach in understanding the

response. As a researcher then I needed to reflect on their experience from the perspective of their life.

> Turning to the phenomena of lived experience means relearning to look at the world by reawakening the basic experience of the world....It is a becoming full of the world; full of lived experience. "Being experienced" is a wisdom of the practice of living which results from having lived life deeply. In doing phenomenological research this practical wisdom is sought in the understanding of the nature of lived experience itself. On the one hand it means that phenomenological research requires of the researcher that he stands in the fullness of life, in the midst of the world of living relations and shared situations. On the other hand it means that the researcher actively explores that category of lived experience in all its modalities and aspects. (Van Manen, 1984, p. 3)

C. Bracketing

Being a "living being", means I come to this research with experiences, attitudes and beliefs of my own. These preconceptions or even biases will influence my reactions to, and understandings, of the stories I hear.

> Existential-phenomenology recognizes the unavoidable presence of the researcher in the formulation of the question, the determination of what are the data, the collection of the data and their interpretation. Rather than attempt to eradicate or avoid such influences through experimental design the phenomenological researcher attempts to articulate predispositions and biases through a process of rigorous self-reflection (bracketing) so that those who read reports of the research will be able to take the researcher's perspective into account. (Osborne, 1989 p. 7)

After each interview I became aware of statements, stories or attitudes which I had reacted to and I found it necessary to bracket my personal experiences and reactions

in order to allow the data to speak for itself without my bias. This was an ongoing process and each time I approached the data there was a need for me to be aware of what was mine and what was not.

Three of the most important personal issues I have had to reflect upon during this research process are: a) my personal experiences of loss b) my perception of motherhood and mothering and c) my religious orientation. What follows is a brief description of the bracketing process related to each of the above issues and the personal meanings my experience has given me.

One of the themes which emerged from the interviews was that of loss and the pain and helplessness experienced during that loss. Because of my personal experiences of loss, it became very important for me to identify my own unresolved grief related to experiences of two miscarriages, my son's heart deformity and personal feelings of helplessness. It was essential I separated my experiences from those similar experiences expressed in the stories I heard, in order for me to be sure I was identifying the participants process and feelings rather than my own. Most importantly, I discovered that my grief experience was indeed a process which was most intensely felt when it involved a loss for my son. Personal loss for me was not as devastating as was realizing losses would be experienced for my children. Also related to loss were my feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. During my loss

experiences I wanted to take responsibility for the loss but could not logically or emotionally do this and therefore I was left feeling "out of control" and "helpless".

With respect to mothering, I became aware of were my personal concept of unconditional love and tough love. I defined more clearly than ever before my attitudes towards disciplining techniques and the role of mother. I have been on the verge of "temper explosions" because of the way my children have behaved and I have sometimes acted out of anger rather than on thoughtful parenting techniques. Because of my experiences of parenting, I have difficulty with parents who are able to maintain a strict "Dr. Spock" approach and never make mistakes. I disagree with most uses of corporal punishment as a means for changing behavior. I believe that the role of mother is one which requires more patience, tolerance, creativity and personal strength than any other role I have filled. It is likely that I hold mothers on a pedestal and believe that the mothering/homemaking role is one of the most vital in our society, yet the least recognized and least appreciated. I believe a good mother to be one who loves and encourages a positive sense of self in her children while maintaining belief in and love for herself and her role. Such a task takes time, dedication, perseverance and courage.

Finally I needed to reexamine my personal experience of God and His role or control in my life. I come from a

Catholic religious tradition and have based most of my beliefs in God on the teachings of this doctrine. I do not view my life as predestined, nor do I believe God chooses to make things happen because of a higher plan or purpose. I believe we have free will to choose and that some decisions we make serve humanity and God better than others. No matter what the choice is, we alone are free to make it and are responsible for it. God's role then is in encouraging us to make wise choices. He remains involved as a guide on the journey and spiritual advisor. Responsibility for our actions cannot be given to Him.

D. The Participants

There were four parents who were interviewed, a married couple and two other mothers. All of the participants travelled to Romania together as part of a larger group with the exception of Ellen. Due to the confidentiality of adoption the first participant was contacted after she participated in a newspaper interview related to her experience. She was then asked to mention this research project to other parents who had adopted, and was given a phone number others could contact if they were interested in participating. The other three parents initiated contact with me after hearing about the research and were motivated to participate because of painful personal experiences and a willingness to help others. This is of particular importance since it was the difficulty of

the adoption experience which motivated them to participate. As one parent explained, "If I can help someone else get through what we've come through, then I 11 feel like I've done something worthwhile."

For all of the adoptive parents interviewed, the adopted child had been in the home for a period of at least six months but no longer than one year at the time of the first interview. The youngest adopted child was two years old at the time of adoption and the oldest was three and one-half. All of the children were identified as having some type of physical disability when adopted and one to two years developmental delay.

What follows is a brief description of each of the participants and will hopefully encourage a greater understanding of their experience.

Ellen and Adam

Ellen and Adam have been married for more than ten years and have three birth children. They are both well educated and hold degrees from University programs. When they decided to adopt from Romania, Adam was employed by a community organization in which both he and Ellen were very involved. Their decision to go to Romania was based on their love for all children and the desire to make a difference in the life of an orphaned child. Though others questioned whether or not they had the financial means to raise a fourth child, they remained convinced their

decision was the right one for them and were in part responding to a call from God. Adam travelled to Romania to pursue the adoption and was gone from home for approximately two months. Ellen remained in Canada with her birth children during the process of the adoption.

The adoption had dire consequences for Ellen and Adam as Adam was forced to find other employment as a direct result of the decision to adopt. As well they experienced alienation from members of a community they had been previously involved with.

The child they adopted is the youngest in their family and exhibits behavior problems and developmental delays. Adam and Ellen were interviewed together at their home. When a description of themes had be developed they responded in writing to the accuracy of the themes separately and mentioned they did not consult each other in their responses.

Beth

Beth is mother of one birth child and has been married for ten years. Both she and her husband hold University degrees and Beth was employed outside her home prior to the adoption. Beth and her husband chose to adopt because of a desire for another child but preferred to have an older child join their family rather than an infant. Beth travelled to Romania to pursue the adoption while her husband remained in Canada. She returned with two children

who were both developmentally delayed and exhibited institutional behaviors.

Mary

Mary is a professional woman who worked outside her home part time prior to the adoption. She has been married for ten years and after a difficult pregnancy and delivery had one birth child. The desire for a second child and difficulty with conception and pregnancy led Mary and her husband to choose adoption. They were pursuing adoption in Alberta when the opportunity to adopt from Romania arose. Mary travelled to Romania and left the care of her birth child to her husband and his parents. She was gone for a period of about two months. During this time she experienced the loss of a child in the final stages of the adoption process, as the birth mother denied consent on the court date. Mary pursued adoption of other children in Romania following this loss but had no success. She returned home without a child.

She was contacted by an outside agency who pursued adoption of a Romanian child for her, and Mary needed only to return to Romania to finalize the paperwork and bring home the child. After much agonizing she chose to return to Romania once more to adopt a child. Her adopted child exhibited some developmental delays, behavioral and physical problems following the adoption.

E. The Interview

Interview was chosen as the method for data collection since it allowed the participants the most latitude in recounting their experiences. It is agreed by qualitative researchers that interviewing provides the researcher with a glimpse into the life world of those interviewed and can provide both depth and breadth of information pertinent to the research question (Berg, 1989). My personal struggle was in the choice of interview format; unstructured, semi-structured or structured. Issues which became important in my decision were my personal knowledge about the Romanian adoption experience, what I hoped to be the goal of this research, and finally the role of the interviewee.

It has been argued that the researcher who has the greatest developed understanding of the experience under study is mostly likely to rely upon the structured interview schedule (McCracken, 1990). This assumption is based on the belief that the researcher who chooses this format has examined the question in enough detail to have identified those parts of the experience which are essential to that research question and the somewhat "inevitable" path the interview will take. "On the other hand the less knowledgeable investigator who is unclear about the topic and aims of the study can turn to the `flexible strategy of discovery,' namely the unstructured interview" (Mishler, 1986, p. 29). The difficulty with this assumption is that it focuses on the interviewer

rather than the purpose of the interview itself. If I, as the researcher, am to remain true to the data I must allow the participants the latitude to respond in a manner which reflects their experience. It is their story and therefore should be told the way they need to tell it. If the choice of interview format is based solely upon my personal knowledge about the experience, rather than considering the research question and the role of the participants, then it is likely that I will not recognize the gifts of the story nor find an answer to the question I have asked.

In my experience the choice of interview format was a difficult and central issue. Having researched international adoption prior to any interviews and informally discussing with parents who had adopted children from other countries, I felt I had a well developed understanding of the international adoption experience. Based on this "knowledge" I developed an interview schedule which I believed would cover all facets of the Romanian adoption experience. Several of the questions reflected the issues related to cultural sensitivity and the necessity for adoptive parents to prepare for cultural differences of their child. During my first interview with a mother who adopted a Romanian child I discovered that her concerns at present had little to do with culture and more to do with basic coping strategies for unusual and difficult behaviors. Because of the movement away from the interview schedule, it was necessary to provide the

opportunity for the mother to tell her own story in the form of an unstructured interview. At the end of her story I referred back to the interview schedule I had prepared and included any areas which may have been omitted.

Before I interviewed a second participant, I needed to define more clearly the goal of this research. Did I desire to develop depth or breadth in understanding this phenomena and therefore was it necessary to limit the scope of the phenomena as articulated by the participants? My choice was to leave the choice of interview format up to the participants and thereby involve them in determining the goal of the research.

> Some people debate which approach is more effective, the structured or the unstructured. With semi-structured interviews you are confident of getting comparable data across subjects, but you lose the opportunity to understand how the subjects themselves structure the topic at hand. (Bogdan & Biklen 1992, p. 97)

Interestingly all four of the parents initially chose to use the interview schedule but during the course of the interview began to tell their personal stories leaving the structure aside. The schedule became a guideline which was referred to at the end of the interview initiating discussion about other aspects of the experience which may have been excluded from the stories.

The final consideration in interview format choice is related to the role of the interviewee.

> All interviewers see the interviewee as life-world experts in the phenomenon...but for some the interviewee is primarily a describer; for others the interviewee is a describer and co-interpreter; for still others, the researcher participants are the co-authors of the final conclusions. (Becker, p. 110)

I consider the participants of this study to fill all of the roles mentioned. They described with feeling and clarity their experiences. Their personal reflection and insight had brought them to a greater understanding of the process of the experience and thus a personal interpretation of it. Finally the beauty and poignancy of their stories, in the way they were told, lends itself to emotional reading and by including parts of these stories in the writing of this research I aim to remain true to their experience. The role of the participant was determined by the meaning the phenomena held for them. It became the choice of the participant rather than my personal decision.

> It is of primary importance for the interviewers to realize that each research topic, as well as each interview, is a unique event. While we can learn how to interview by doing it, and by watching and listening to other interviewers, the interview is, above all, a creative process occurring between the participants. Thus the most important principle that guides interviewing is a respect for the interpersonal encounter between the interviewer and the interviewee. (Beckman, 1984, p. 108)

I chose to give the participants in the interview the option of where to meet with them. I felt it was essential to make the participants as comfortable as possible as well as making the interview experience as convenient as

possible. Since the participants were parents of young children, they all preferred to have me come to their homes during the afternoon when their children slept. This provided the opportunity to meet with me without the expense and difficulty of arranging for child care, in an environment which was comfortable and yet gave us some privacy. An added dimension was observing the interaction between the parents and their children.

F. Developing the Themes

Once amidst the experience of adopting a Romanian child it became my task to uncover common themes in the stories of the participants. My role was more directed to organizing the information which evolved and providing a means for comparison to the stories of others in the experience. There emerged a collective voice or story of this experience which had a collective meaning for those involved. The themes, then, reflected stages and characteristics of the adoption experience common to all the participants, yet there remained a uniqueness to each of the individual stories.

> So phenomenological themes are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus experienced as meaningful wholes....No conceptual formulation or a single statement can possibly capture the full mystery of this experience. So a phenomenological theme is much less a singular statement (concept or category) than an actual description of the structure of a lived experience. As such, a so-called thematic phrase does not do justice to the fullness of the life of a phenomenon. A thematic phrase

> only serves to point at, to allude to , or to hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon. (Van Manen, 1984, p. 21)

The themes were identified by two methods. First was the highlighting approach, which was followed by the line-by-line approach (Van Manen, 1989, p. 21). After each interview I wrote my impressions of the significant elements of the experience for parents. I would then reread the transcript and note or highlight keywords which might reflect a larger theme. This gave me a general sense of what types of themes might emerge by focusing on those parts of the experience which were most prominent of its tone and mood.

The second method of organization began by paraphrasing the lines of the interviews. Each meaning unit of the paraphrase was then coded and the codes were clustered into higher order groups. Once these clusters were completed there began to emerge certain themes which were present in all four of the interviews.

Interestingly these themes were very similar to the ones identified earlier. Neither of these approaches, highlighting or line-by-line went on independently of each other, but rather it was more of a circular process in which ideas uncovered by one method encouraged new or similar ideas during the action of the other.

A summary of the themes was sent out to the participants in order to verify their accuracy. They were given the opportunity to respond to the themes or provide

alternative ones which they felt were omitted. All participants recognized the themes as accurate and some parents even mentioned parts of their stories which most closely reflected the description of the theme. These selections appear as examples within each theme. After receiving any additional input a final description of the themes was developed.

The findings were than taken to a Romanian Adoption Support Group and presented. Thirteen other parents, who had not previously been interviewed, recognized the themes as descriptive of their process and gave further suggestion and clarification of the themes as they related to their experience. Overall there was agreement with the themes with some variation depending on the circumstance surrounding the trip to Romania, and thus the acceptance of the theme Living the Culture. This input will be described in the final chapter.

IV. THE EXPERIENCE

The difficulty in describing the experience of Romanian adoption lies in capturing the intensity of emotion which accompanies it. The parents who were interviewed did not merely describe an adoption process but described how this experience effected them on every level. By listening to their stories I was given the opportunity to glimpse at this spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical experience. I was overwhelmed by the gift of their honesty and fear that in organizing this data and recounting their stories the poignancy would be lost. For this reason I have included several excerpts from the interviews allowing the experience to be told by those who lived it. I also find it necessary to preface these results by briefly describing my experience in listening to the parents and entering into their journey with them.

In my preliminary work of informal interviews with adoptive parents I believed I had a good foundation of knowledge regarding the adoption process. I was somewhat focused on the legalities and actual physical aspect of adoption rather than the emotional. I contacted the first participant requesting an interview and explained it would take about two hours. Four hours later she had given much insight into the experience and the enormity of it. By the last interview I was no longer surprised that it went on for hours and although there was great similarity amongst

stories I was captivated by the depth of emotion and insight each parent shared with me.

It is essential that I emphasis the vastness of this experience. The adoptions have effected every aspect of these parents' lives. What appears to be one decision or one period in their lives is really a beginning, middle and end to the past, present and future. This is not one experience or one piece of their lives. It is more like the growth of a seed relying on those natural elements to begin sprouting. As it grows it is impossible to identify its start or anticipate its end. So too, are the stories of the parents who have adopted. Their decisions, beliefs, emotional responses and coping strategies are all based on yesterday, today and tomorrow and therefore the experience of Romanian adoption is immense and life pervading. What follows is my glimpse into this experience, structured in such a way as to identify the commonalties of the experience for all of the parents.

The experience has been divided into three "stages" which reflect a certain time period in the process. Within each stage there are several themes that describe the characteristics of that period.

A. The Decision to Adopt

Frustration and Uncertainty

All parents were motivated to adopt because of a desire for another child. For Mary there was complications with conception and pregnancy. Several attempts had been made to become pregnant and to carry a child to full term, but these attempts were unsuccessful and very painful. Adoption seemed to be a viable option giving Mary the opportunity to add a child to her family when attempts at natural conception and birth had failed. Beth preferred to adopt an older child to her family rather than give birth to an infant believing that an older child would better meet their family's needs. Finally Adam and Ellen were motivated to adopt because of the situation in Romania and felt their family had something to offer a child institutionalized as well as recognizing the gifts an adopted child could bring to their family.

For Mary and Beth, who sought provincial adoption prior to a Romanian one, adoption avenues in Alberta presented several difficulties and obstacles. Parents who were pursuing adoption of an infant were faced with long waiting lists of approximately five years. Beth, who specifically pursued an interracial adoption, was discouraged by adoption workers who focused on issues of prejudice and discrimination. She had hoped to adopt an Indian child and describes an interview she and her husband had with an adoption worker.

> He was very pessimistic about us getting a child and he was listing all the drawbacks. And then in the second interview he went into the race and he actually got the map of India out and he started going around the map and telling us what Indian children would look like from each part of the country, saying " Oh children from this area, if you adopted from this area, they'd be very dark and there would be lighter Indian children here." And this was after we had told him that we didn't care if the child was black or white. And he was saying things like, "Oh well, you know, some Indian children are light and some Indian children are dark but most adoptions come from the dark areas." And I couldn't believe that he would be going into racism especially after we had told him that wasn't an issue for us.

All parents felt this type of frustration when dealing with those services put in place to aid in the process of adoption. They found adoption workers very discouraging of adoption in general and frequently reminded parents of the waiting, process and adjustment difficulties they could expect. Although parents believed those people were attempting to provide a realistic picture of the experience and discourage those who were not truly committed to it, the parents experienced great frustration with the continual pessimism, slowness of the process and an overall reluctance to help on the part of those expected to provide supportive services.

There were also difficulties associated with the decision to adopt from Romania which created more frustration and some uncertainty for parents. There were several changes in the paperwork required for the adoption and parents were expected to be aware of these on their own

initiative. No one person or agency could provide a complete guideline as to what would be needed in Romania or what would need to be completed in Canada prior to going Of most help were other parents who had adopted previously, however the continually changing agreement between Romania and Canada made it difficult to remain informed of the legal process. Each new document sought meant more time waiting. Waiting for home studies to be completed, waiting for a signed document or waiting for forms to be approved and mailed, added to the discouragement and frustration. Mary describes how personal waiting game was for her.

> And the cost involved, all the personal costs, with the home studies, and the immigration and the kids health histories. It just went legal and legal paper work is just incredible. While I put my job on hold or people quit their jobs because they were going to Romania or they were going to be a Mom. You know that kind of thing just because (they) didn't pull their act together. There was more riding on it than people just going to Romania for a trip. There were lives and families and jobs and everything else on the line. So we were really disappointed. Frustrated, mad by then.

Uncertainty was also experienced in the decision to adopt from Romania. Children coming from institutions have frequently been referred to as "damaged goods" and there was concern associated with the experiences the children had prior to the adoption. Parents had no way of knowing if the child would have great difficulty adjusting to the family and forming a positive relationship with them. Medical and social histories were not always available, leaving parents unsure as to whether they would be able to

deal with physical or emotional conditions which might occur. When asked what fears parents had about adopting a Romanian child, they usually talked about the uncertainty of the past of the child and concern for the future.

> One fear would just be that we would do everything for this child and we would do apparently no good or have no effect. The other was nervousness about things like aids. We had determined even before going, not to have a blood test before bringing him back,... and then if it did have something like aids or equally serious that it would make no difference to us really. We would care for that child for whatever time we had it. Maybe that's another fear, that we would only have this child for a short time because there may be major problems.

The many unknowns, and a lack of clear information about the adoption process itself, were difficult issues for the parents. The frustration and uncertainty was by far the most pervading theme of the decision to adopt, and these feelings were experienced frequently throughout the entire process.

Hope

Although this period was filled with difficulties, parents began to experience a sense of hopefulness about a situation which had previously seemed hopeless. Mary and Beth who were having difficulty with provincial channels of adoption saw the Romanian adoption as an opportunity to meet their needs as well as the needs of an orphaned child. "So it was a perfect match between what we wanted and children needing us." For these parents who had previously sought other types of adoptions, the fact the child would

be from Romania had little to do with their decision. They simply wanted a child and Romania had children whom they believed would benefit from their home. This opportunity gave the families hope for finding a child within the near future.

> But it didn't really matter to us where the child came from and because children were available from Romania that's why we chose there. I knew nothing about Romania, nothing about the heritage or the culture. I hadn't even seen any of the documentaries or I hadn't read about them or seen anything so I wasn't motivated by what I had seen and the conditions. I wasn't motivated by seeing the poor little kids in the orphanage. It wasn't like that. All of our reasons to adopt were because we wanted to have another child. It didn't have to do with the Romanian children.

Adam and Ellen who decided to adopt based upon the situation in Romania also experienced a sense of hopefulness, but in a different form. Their hope lay in their ability to help just one other person, an orphaned child, by providing a loving and nurturing home. Compelled by love for humanity they were moved when exposed to the lives of children living in Romanian orphanages. Instead of viewing the situation as one of despair, they were able to find an opportunity for their family to become involved in a global problem on a very personal level. Thus they acted out of a hopefulness and optimism for all of humanity. The simplest and yet most moving story of this hopefulness is described by Ellen who discusses the decision to adopt with her eldest child.

> The very first time I talked to our oldest about our plans, we were in the car and I started explaining the best I could in a seven year old way, what was happening in Romania. And I said, "Do you think there's anything we could do?" I didn't say anything about adoption. I just said to her there's all these kids that are in big houses with not very much to eat. And she just looked at me a said, "Mommy, can we bring one here and love it? Just one?" And that opened the door.

This sense of hope, for a new child, for a new family unit, and for the improving of a child's life was essential in the parents pursuit of the adoption. When each obstacle was encountered their conviction to the decision to adopt and optimism in the promise of a future urged them to carry on.

God and Faith

For Mary, Adam and Ellen the recognition of God and His plan or calling was the greatest factor in the decision to adopt from Romania. It did not appear to be a factor in Beth's decision but she does recognize having a religious affiliation. This decision, though based on several factors, was seen as a spiritual calling and God would guide them through the process.

> During the entire preparation time I felt as if we were going through doors by faith. We did not know what was on the other side. It was a matter of obedience and our faith grew individually and as a family as we went ahead. God provided everything we needed along the way especially finances.

Parents believed God provided a choice, opportunity and challenge and they, being faithful, rose to meet it with conviction.

> In a sense it was a (spiritual calling). It was because we knew that this was something we felt, we had such strong assurances, that this is something we're supposed to do even though we had no reasonable way of doing it. That for us just being obedient to do that thing was as important to us as having a child and coming back with it. I reread a portion of my journal the other day, and I made the comment that what we were doing was not rational. It wasn't irrational but it just didn't fit the category of being rational. And maybe that was, is, the faith component of it. That we just knew our faithfulness in doing this was as much the process as anything else. It really turned out to be that kind of a, I don't want to use the word adventure, an experience for us....And it was like one step at a time. It was like God was opening doors a little bit at a time.

Parents also attributed acts of generosity or unlikely positive happenings to God's intervention in the process making it possible. Adam describes finding one thousand dollars taped to his office door, anonymously given, on the day he needed exactly that amount to pay for a home study. Ellen describes being sold a car for a dollar because she was in desperate need of a vehicle, from someone she hardly knew. Departure dates were unexpectedly changed allowing Mary to journey to Romania, when she had initially thought it impossible for her to get away. Friends would impulsively call because they had a "feeling" Mary needed some help, and sure enough she was in a bind which was solved by the aid of a friend. The stories are endless and each one describing unlikely and surprising events believed to be God's involvement in the process.

> What God was saying to me was,"When I give you a job to do, when I say go to Romania, I'll make

> it possible and I'll make it work. Leave it in my hands and I'll do it." And He did.

This type of faithfulness and conviction to God's plan is best described in the story of Mary who experienced great loss as a result of going to Romania. Even though there is great pain, she remains faithful to God and His will for her to seek an adoption, by framing her pain in terms of a lesson of faith and trust.

> There's an analogy I heard this summer that talks about trust and I guess that's what my last year was in learning to trust God, even when I don't see where he's taking me. There's two men walking along the road and there's two boys playing on the fence, walking on the fence and playing. And the one man said to the other man, "Watch this." And he goes over to the two boys and he puts his arms out and he says to the first boy, "Jump". And the little boy wouldn't jump so he got closer and he said "Jump now". And the little boy still wouldn't jump. So he got closer still and said, "Jump now". And the little boy still wouldn't jump until he had his hands under his armpits and more or less put him down. And then the man moved back. Even farther than from where he had started with the first boy, and he reached out and said to the second boy, "Jump." And the little guy leaps into his arms. And the second man says, "What happened? How did you do that?" And the man said, "The second boy, he's my son. He has had a lifetime of trust." And we had to jump that way with Romania....You know that is sort of the beauty behind all of this, even though it hurt. You know to say, "O.K. God we'll jump." And in that way we've come to a real peace about it.

B. The Journey

Living the Culture

The predominant theme of the experience of travelling to Romania was related to the values and existence of the Romanian people. As citizens of Canada the parents were accustomed to a comfortable standard of living with little difficulty in providing the basic essentials of life. In Romania, however, the people are very poor and live in conditions which shock Canadians.

> It wasn't a nice experience. There was no running water and when there was it was brown. Forty degrees, flies everywhere. I was just covered with flea bites.... We stayed in the nicest area in Bucharest. In fact Ceausescu just lived a couple of blocks from there, his residence. And so it was the posh area of the place, but it was so run down and so stinky and so ugly. Like there was a big dog, a German Shepherd, and he was doing his number all over the place. It was just awful.

> One night we went down to Bucharest and slept at the seminary down there and they apologized to us for the lack of heat because they had no fuel. And when we ate with them they apologized because the room was so cold we had to keep our downfilled jackets on and they said, "We're sorry but we don't have enough fuel to heat this room." It's a general condition there. Even to keep things clean. Well when you only have water for two hours a day, you just can't keep up with the dirt.

Even more unsettling for the parents than the conditions they were forced to live in were the conditions of the orphanages. Though there were several different standards of conditions amongst orphanages, all of them experienced lack of water, heat and child care workers.

> There wasn't a lot there for the kids. It was very plain... I would say on the average there

> were about twenty kids per room. And they would sleep together and they would play together. ... We did see some of the food which was disgusting...The bathroom areas were, in the pre-schalarie (infant orphanage), basically a hole in the floor. Just going straight down. No hot water. Very little heating. Sanitary conditions were not good, for the most part, and this included the hospitals. To even dry their laundry what they did was just spread it out on the bushes in the back. And they generally had about one adult to supervise and educate twenty to twenty-five children....Most of the children were dressed in multiple layers of clothing because they didn't have heating. The last time I visited with (my adopted son) in the orphanage, when they brought him to me, there was still food crusted in his ear that looked like it had been there for a couple of days. And he had soiled himself and there had been no attention to that.

Beyond the physical conditions of Romania there was the culture of the people to deal with. It was described as one of hopelessness, helplessness and powerlessness. People had lived under oppressive conditions for so long that they became incapable of making quick decisions or acting in an independent manner. There was a sense of futility and a belief that whatever action they might take to change their lives would be pointless, therefore why even try. Generation after generation of Romanian people experienced this hopelessness creating a cycle of this type of resignation. As a result, in some cases, people lived by a different value system than is accepted as "morally right" in Canada. Instead of judging the behavior of the Romanian people, adoptive parents recognized that they were victims of the political and economic situation in Romania.

> They don't have a thought process like us. They don't know what value is. They cannot value

> things the way we do. It's just a totally different culture. Even the workers within the institution, they have families that they can't put food on the table for. They have children that they can't feed. And so when we bring formula to the hospitals to feed the babies that we're going to adopt, our babies don't get the formula because the nurses take it home to feed their own. And we were really angry at that except who can blame a mother? Who can blame a mother for stealing food to keep her child alive. It's just a whole culture where stealing is no big deal. You just take what you have to. And how can the workers within the orphanages keep on loving these children and giving for them when year after year there's no hope. When there is no hope for themselves even or for their own children. Why give of yourself to these other kids? It's a whole vicious circle.

Child care workers were not the only ones who seemed trapped into abandoning what Canadians see as morally acceptable behavior because of the impoverished conditions and oppression. Adoptive parents commented on the pain of watching parents bargain for material objects in exchange for their own children. Adam describes being approached on street corners and asked if he wanted to buy sons, daughters, or grandchildren. Mary, when seeking the consent for adoption from a birth mother, was faced with a bargaining situation in which the mother who had abandoned her child at the orphanage since birth now wanted a cassette-a-phone or ghetto blaster in exchange for her daughter.

> And we talked through an interpreter for over an hour and a half, maybe two hours. And she finally said no she wouldn't give consent. And I said, "Well then you keep your child." Not keep her, she had never seen her. She had delivered her and that was it. And I said, "Then I cannot take your child. I will not do that to her, I love her too much. I love

> humanity too much. I cannot devalue a human being. And I never, never regretted that decision, and even while I was saying "no" I didn't twinge. I wasn't tempted to say "yes". And yet it was incredibly painful to know that (her daughter's) whole future in life was based on a twenty five American dollar purchase. That was the painful part of it. Not my behavior but the outcome of that. My decision was tragic.

The effect of these social and economic conditions which forced parents to barter for their children and child care workers to focus only on physical care was evident in the children of the orphanage as well. Some children became "like wild animals, because they had been treated like animals their whole lives. And by animal I mean self preservation instincts." More often, however, the children seemed to have that same sense of helplessness and resignation which pervades the entire culture.

> We walked into an orphanage and I saw a bunch of children that did not look like children anymore, in their eyes. They were physically there, O.K., but no life, nothing that makes them human anymore. And that one hit me real hard. There is nothing that makes a person human. None of that is given to them. Almost none.

Parents recognized that there were also supportive and helpful people who lived in Romania, and describe many instances of generosity and good will from impoverished people. "They had nothing to give and yet they would give you everything they had." One Canadian mother describes a family who gave her a gift which was worth three months salary, and the sacrifice that this meant for them. They were not people incapable of loving or acts of kindness, and more often than not their gestures of giving far

surpassed what is considered to be generous by Canadian standards.

However, these gestures were not usually performed by people in positions of power. Judges, guards and government workers often exercised their control over others at random and were both corrupt and unpredictable. It was as if they themselves felt the futility of the culture and therefore exerted whatever power they might have to gain a sense of control in their own lives. There are stories about waiting for government officials who played chess for hours before signing a document, while the parents sat waiting; or being granted permission from an official one day to go ahead with some part of the process and the next day have that permission denied by the same person for no apparent reason. Beth describes how she and one other parent were stopped at the border while transporting seven adopted children to the airport, and were accused of smuggling art work. They were detained for hours and almost missed their flight back to Canada. This lack of control over their situation effected the Canadian parents' own ability to act on a decision and get things done. Thus their journey to Romania was not only a quest for a child but also became a personal experience in living the culture.

Loss

During the experience of living in Romania parents suffered several losses, some of which were more difficult to deal with than others. The four most significant losses during this period were a loss of control resulting from living in the Romanian political and social system, a loss of confidence in parents' own ability to get things done on their return to Canada, a loss of support from employers and friends because of personal disagreement over the adoption, and finally the loss felt for all the children left behind in the Romanian orphanage.

The lack of control experienced in Romania was compared to one of grief. Parents relate previous loss or death experiences when describing the feelings and pain of Romania. Using this as a basis for comparison, they could identify how the experience could continue to be so personally painful weeks and months after the return to Canada. What was unique to the Romanian grieving process was that it was complicated by feelings of helplessness.

> The pain of losing (the adoption) was similar to a grieving, but not the helplessness. It's like nothing I've experienced before. See, when Mom was sick there was still something I could do. I could go visit her cause the car would work. You know you've got gas. I know I could get there. In Romania you don't know if you have a car. You don't know if you have gas. If you line up the gas might be gone by the time the line up is done. You might not have enough money cause who knows what it's worth then. You never....Even the little things that you want to do you probably can't....Nothing that you plan is going to work.

After several weeks of living in a culture accustomed to being unable to assert personal control, parents began to act in a similar manner. Even the smallest decisions or obstacles would leave them feeling helpless. Towards the end of the stay in Romania it became more and more difficult to get things accomplished. After returning to Canada parents continued to experience these feelings of lack of control and helplessness.

> We basically became helpless, even though we weren't. We left a group of people who were willing to take risks by volunteering to go to Romania in the first place. So even though we were those kinds of people we came back helpless. And I remember in one of my letters to (my husband) I said, "The thing right now that I'm scared of most, coming home to Canada, is I have to go grocery shopping." Like I could not imagine myself getting in a car, going to a store and making a decision about what I needed and coming home. That was overwhelming. I just shivered at the thought of it. Physically my body would shiver at the thought of grocery shopping....It's just powerlessness no matter what you do, no matter how small the job, you won't accomplish it.

> I had nightmares about Romania. I still have nightmares about Romania but not as much. But it was always, I'm out of control. Like I've lost control. I haven't any power. I have no hope when ever the word Romania comes up. And when I had to go back I was just sick to my stomach the whole time through. I just hated the thought of going back. I just had such a distaste for it. And almost a hatred. Not a hatred for the people but for the country and what it all stood for, all the pain.

The losses associated with a lack of control, helplessness and the personal pain of Romania have affected many facets of the parents lives.

During the process of adoption and following it members of the extended family would clearly oppose or support the adoption. The third significant loss was a result of the lack of support from friends, family members or employers. For Adam and Ellen the consequences of this opposition were tremendous. Adam's employment position was terminated because of their decision to pursue a Romanian adoption and their family was forced to move to another location. In doing so Adam and Ellen left people they had once identifed as friends but who were now ignoring that friendship as a result of the adoption.

> We've had a tremendous sense of betrayal from those people who we were counting on who had said they'd given their support and then withdrew it. That's just been a hard one to deal with.

> And this has uncovered allot of stuff in us that we didn't know was there and in our grieving leaving (the community). That was really hard. For five years we lived and breathed with these people and probably cared more about their (community) than they did. And when it was time for us to go it really hurt. And I didn't go to (the community gathering) for five weeks because ... I'd spend my time in the bathroom being sick...And so much of that is related to what happened in our family.

There was also a sense of loss felt for all the children who parents had not been able to adopt. Frequently a child had been selected for adoption and the process begun, but all too often that process was ended by lack of parental consent, unacceptable medical conditions by Canadian standards or other legal problems. The

adoptive parents were then faced with letting go of that child which they had hoped to bring home and finding another.

> And having hope that we had a "for sure" adoptable child and then having that fall through. I eventually gave up hoping and decided not to get excited about a child until I knew they were on the plane. This proved to be a problem since my emotions were still in "park" when (my son) arrived and they couldn't get caught up with him fast enough.

Beyond feeling loss for the children parents had hoped to adopt, there was sorrow and grief for all the children left behind in the orphanages. One mother describes seeing a child slowly die in the bed next to the child she would later adopt. She realized she would never be able to bring such a sickly child back to Canada and agonized over the fact that there was little she could do to comfort this child whimpering in pain. Parents described being permanently effected by seeing the plight of these children in Romania.

> Romania changes you. There is no way you could have seen what I have seen and not have it effect you in some way. Not just the bad stuff, but also seeing the way people survived and still they showed some kindness....But mostly the kids. All the rooms filled with unwanted children and the look in their eyes. I don't think I'll ever forget that look.

During the experience of living in Romania parents suffered several other losses. Since the parents had travelled to Romania and lived there as a group, they experienced each others joys and losses. One mother describes feeling loss over "the heartbreaking experiences

of other people in our group. When someone's adoption fell through it felt as though everyone had suffered a miscarriage."

The most obvious loss was the separation from their spouses and birth children who remained in Canada. Ellen, who remained in Canada had to continue to manage the family affairs and care for her children alone, often feeling like "a single parent". This was complicated by trying to make some sort of physical and emotional preparations for the adopted child. Mary and Beth, who went to Romania lost their freedom and power since in the Romanian culture women are not considered to be equal to men and most often remain in very traditional roles. For this reason Canadian women were limited in the places they were able to travel and the amount they could get accomplished.

All parents expressed frustration at the loss of ability to communicate with the people of Romania because of the language difference. They were forced to rely on translators who frequently did not completely or clearly communicate what was being said. The political system made it difficult to freely communicate with people back in Canada since telephones were tapped and letters opened. Finally there was financial loss associated with the adoption and families were forced to enter into debt as a result. This however, seemed of secondary importance for them.

C. Adjustment

Chaos

The first few months of adjustment with the new family member has been described as one of chaos and uncertainty. Physical ailments and developmental delays kept parents guessing and searching for new means of coping. Unusual behaviors and reactions were difficult to deal with since accepted Canadian parenting practices had little effect in initiating change. The birth children of the adoptive parents also had difficulty adjusting as their once "normal" family had been upset by the addition of an unpredictable member. These children had to deal with the fear that mom or dad may be leaving again for a long period of time as they had on their first trip to Romania. Spouses who had gone to Romania needed to get re-aquainted with their partners at a time when the family unit was undergoing change and difficulty. This was complicated by the grief process each family member was experiencing resulting from the trip to Romania and the new family unit.

The adjustment factors seemed endless and the new and unusual situations parents were faced with countless. This theme of chaos emerged from the interviews in exactly that way; disjointed, confusing and startling. What follows are excerpts from the interviews which reflect the chaos they experienced.

> The first three months, two months in particular....The first two months were like constant hurricane around here.

It was just horrid. I can't even explain it. It was just wild....I wanted to take a picture of her to send back to Romania. I couldn't get a good picture of her because her face was always full of scabs somewhere. We had holes in our walls and everything. She just runs and knocks another hole in the wall.

She was a little fire ball. She just tore through this place. First of all she couldn't hear and we didn't know it. She didn't know stairs. She'd never seen sand. She'd never seen running water. So everything was new to her. So she was overstimulated first of all. And wild, and whatever she wanted she took. If (my son) had food on his plate she took it and ate it. If he had a toy she just plowed over him. Physically took over his territory, so not only did she take Mommy from him because I had to put a lot of attention on to her because she was going to hurt herself. And she needed a lot of reassurance and she needed an awful lot. My son hadn't seen me again for a week and didn't know if I was going to be gone again for three months so he was dealing with all of that. And so it was just a whirlwind around here and she was rough, just really, really physically rough.

And then she decided that she didn't want to pee on the potty ever. And she'd look at me and squat down on the kitchen floor and pee on the kitchen floor. And do her big number on the floor.

And in our house we don't slam doors or yell. And the first two months that's all we did in this house. Not (my husband) and I but (our adopted daughter)....She was so loud, loud, loud. And for (my son) and I to hear each other we had to be even louder. Like it was just unbelievable. I was constantly taking tylenol or whatever just to stop from going crazy from the noise in here.... And during that time she would scream so loud that in the winter time people two houses down would hear it in their house when she'd scream. And that was over potty training or something. And the physical abuse I got from both of them.

Before (my adopted daughter) came home, (my son) had always been very happy, very quiet, but

still he can have fun. But he's got a very, very pleasant spirit about him....And I came home with (my adopted daughter) on Saturday night and Monday morning he wakes up and walks into my bedroom and says, "Mommy?" And I open my eyes. And he says, "Take her home!" And from there on he was trying to convince me to take her home. And he bit me, and hit me and slugged me. And he was physically vicious. Which he had never been....And to have this child draw blood from me literally everyday, that hurt the most. (My adopted daughter's) viciousness was almost like a stranger hurting me, because I hadn't had that bonding yet. It didn't cut as deep as when (my son) did it to me. Whoa, that was tough.

I phoned (a friend) up right after Christmas and said, "I don't want (my adopted daughter) in my home. I've lost control of our happy home. I don't want her anymore." Because she has in a way destroyed our perfect family.

When (my adopted son) first came he was kind of semi-autistic. He couldn't walk and talk. He couldn't do anything. He was frightened of everything. He used to scream all the time.

He didn't know how to cry. It was sort of something he'd unlearned. We had to, when we disciplined him he would laugh at us because he didn't quite know how to process all the information, and the emotional responses from that. It drove us crazy. It scared us because we thought, "What are we going to do with him.

What they didn't tell us in those little broadcasts is sometimes some of the adjustments that are made. There is no honeymoon period. He was so hungry. He was malnourished. He had dysentery. I didn't know what he could eat. And he had the most interesting smells.

The initial problem was in the beginning his being unselective about who he would go to. He'd go to everybody and that was dangerous. We were really cautious the first while we had him because if he ever got separated from us he didn't know who he was or where he was. He would be totally lost. And would go with anybody. So there was no, even though he looked to be affectionate, there wasn't any real bonding there. I'd say I was afraid I was going to lose him. Not that someone would take him

> away just that I thought he'd leak out of the house and how he had no way of identifying himself or who he belonged to.
>
> He has been the trigger for a lot of very strong emotions in us. Be it a lot of anger and frustration. So that adjustment has been really hard for us. To get control of those things.
>
> When I brought (my adopted son) home Ellen and I were at such different stages emotionally. She had to gear up for this child coming home. And I had a lot of things to unload. And that, I don't know, we were emotionally ready going into the adoption. We knew the process, but I think the experience had kind of thrown us off kilter a little bit. And it's taken this year to sort of get back on normal. And he, within two days of being here, he knew which buttons to push to get a response from us.
>
> I had my husband to lean on but he had a hard time with it too. Like he'd leave in the mornings crying and come home in the evenings crying. He was just devastated as well and yet it was nice for him to have me home.... He just needed me to be there and too, in that way he needed my loving...And I needed his arms. It was a difficult time but I think it has deepened our relationship.

The period of chaos was the beginning of months of finding ways to cope for parents. Since what they had expected was not exactly what was happening in their homes and to their families.

Coping

During this adjustment stage there were several elements parents had to cope with, most obviously were the unusual behaviors of the adopted children and their physical and emotional needs. All the adopted children exhibited at least some of the following behaviors; head banging, rocking, self biting, over eating or inability to

eat solids, aggressive tendencies, fearfulness of others or being over friendly with strangers, fear of animals or water; tantrums, excessive yelling or crying, inability to cry, inability to control volume and overstimulation excitability. Although the parents expected they would be faced with some of these behavioral problems, they were overwhelmed by the ineffectiveness of those parenting techniques they had assumed would work in changing these behaviors.

> I used to believe that I was a good mom, because of my cuddling with (my son) and giving reassurance and we clapped and we tickled and giggled. And you know all those things, and we read books. And I knew that he was an easy child. And after (my adopted daughter) came along everything that I thought would work in parenting fell apart. Everything that I believed in myself about being able to handle with children, like if you're consistent and firm they listen. Ya right! When we had heard about Romania, we thought we would take Romanian children in I thought that we would get, well like this analogy I heard of a flower that just hadn't blossomed, and that in our hands this flower would just blossom. And that all this kid would need is just lots and lots of love. And that is what (our adopted daughter) needs but not in the form I thought. I never knew that she would need as much time out as she did. Or that she would need as much discipline and firm strict guidelines. You know all that hard side of love as opposed to the soft side. That I was not prepared for.
>
> We have three very different children that are homegrown. And they have sort of, especially number two, tested what I thought was appropriate for discipline and that sort of thing. None of those things work for (my adopted son). None of those. Well what would you do if your child laughed at you when you'd speak to him real sternly?

> The hardest part, the hardest part of it is the continual learning process, and you have to do it basically on your own. So a lot of what you do is self-discovery.

Besides the behavioral difficulties there were medical and developmental problems. Unusual parasites and fungal infections puzzled pediatricians and left the parents again guessing at how to cope. Developmental delays were addressed by special education or rehabilitation programs which were sometimes hard to access. Generally parents describe those people in the medical and educational professions as very willing to provide assistance, however, they were not always sure what could be done.

> And muddling through with health issues, muddling with other people in the Romanian group, because they had trouble identifying here, the fungal infection, the dysentery. Those things we could muddle through with others but most things are sort of, take a deep breath and think and remember where you've come from. But it still doesn't help some days. Some days it still beats you.

Parents were generally on their own when it came to developing coping strategies. Perceptions of parenting abilities changed and a new type of love was learned, one which required perseverance and dedication. Parents were faced with endless challenges from their adopted child and sometimes it was only their commitment to the decision to adopt that kept them going.

> The biggest thing in my mind is you have to keep very firm resolve that what you get is right. And you have to keep committed to that well beyond the time of the adoption. And simply to accept whatever good comes from it. Things can change so badly or so quickly from positive to negative that it just makes your head spin. I

> guess if you have a high commitment for what you did and remember that there are a lot of behaviors that have been learned even in these young lives prior to us getting them. That sort of thinking really keeps you on track.

Another difficulty parents had to cope with was the reactions of others. The general public knows little about adoption and parents find themselves continuously educating others about the process and experience. Remarks such as "How many real children do you have?" or "Do you have any children of your own?" frustrate parents since it implies their adopted children are not loved or are in someway less important to parents than birth children. Generally people were either supportive of the decision to adopt, opposed to it or treated the parents like heroes or saviors. Those who were supportive were sometimes the only source of solace in an otherwise upside down world. The greatest support was found in other parents who had adopted Romanian children.

> And it's nice to find somebody who had been through what you've been through. You know somebbody whose been through the same situation. When you've got problems you don't need someone saying, "But look at (my adopted children) they're so wonderful." I need to speak to someone who says, "Yes, yes. I'm frustrated too." And that's what you get from someone whose lived through the experience.

When people consider these adoptive parents to be incredibly courageous or almost heroic the parents are uncomfortable and feel misunderstood.

> We are simply doing what we knew we had to do. And I would expect that of anybody. It may appear wonderful in their eyes. I guess that's

> their evaluation of it. We deflect those comments as much as possible.

More often, however, parents are confronted by people who strongly oppose the adoption and make that opinion clear. Prejudice for another race, a lack of understanding about the adoption process, intolerance for the Romanian situation, and financial concerns are generally the basis for these comments.

> This has been stated to me. "Don't bring someone else's problems into your home. You have enough problems of you own without bringing someone else's problem in." The other comment was strictly financial. You know, basically the comment was that we're not really paying you enough to survive as a family of five, how can you expect to survive as a family of six. But for us it was not a financial decision. That was what people really could not understand. To them the finances appeared to be the biggest obstacle, but to us they were the smallest concern we had.

Parents also had to cope with family changes. Siblings needed time to readjust to the family unit and the unusual behavior of their adopted brother or sister. Changes in the marital relationship occurred as parents found themselves in unknown territory with personal feelings and child rearing skills. New feelings for and understanding of their spouses were discovered. When these feelings were dealt with it made their relationship stronger. This did not happen quickly and there was great pain and effort involved.

> I have never challenged (my husband) before. We have been, basically in agreement with anything we've done with our children. And the children

> know that we are united on our decisions. Yet, with (our adopted child) especially on the thumb sucking issue, I had to stir up my courage. Gird my loins as they say in the books.
>
> And as much time as our children need we need to take time for our relationship. I'm sorry but your mate is still more important. Because without a strong relationship you're not going to have a strong family.

Even though the parents have to cope with a magnitude of problems they are convinced that things will get better over time and their lives will get easier. They see it as a long process which has just begun.

Unexpected Feelings

When entering into the decision to adopt all of the parents were not prepared for the incredible feelings they would have. One of the most prominent feelings resulted from the experience of Romania and the association of this experience with their child. Seeing the conditions of Romania aided the parents in understanding the behaviors of their child, and helped them recognize that the situations their child had come from greatly influenced his or her reactions to people, places, water, food and objects. Faced with the daily struggle of dealing with these reactions it was important to remember the child's roots to maintain some sort of perspective on their behavior. In some cases the adopted child was a reminder of the feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and loss which were experienced in Romania.

> The first couple of months I still looked at her in her crib with a physical repulsion but I know

> that that was because of Romania. Because of when I think of Romania I at first could throw up, literally I got physically ill. I just hated Romania. And when I saw her it was Romania. And also because I was so scared of losing her that I didn't want to love her because it would just be too hard. And I still for months had nightmares that they took her away from me. And all of that. That at the last minute they'd follow me to Canada and take her away from me and there was nothing I could do. That helplessness and hopelessness and all that. Those nightmares were just horrible. So I knew that I was distancing myself and that it would just take time, and that was O.K. I needed to give myself that time.

Parents had expected to feel some drawing to, or sense of attachment for, the child when first seen in the orphanage, almost a love at first sight. Unfortunately the physical appearance of the orphanage children was less than appealing which made it difficult for parents to feel an immediate drawing to any child. It took a conscious decision to care for the child and with time parents believed these feelings would increase.

During this time parents were also having difficulty with the destruction of their previous family unit and the struggles of adjustment. The result was a different type of feeling for the child than they had anticipated. Frustration, fear, pain and anger made it difficult to instantly love the child as they had expected.

It is very important to understand these feelings since there is danger in misinterpreting them as those lacking any type of love. There is tremendous personal cost for the parents attached to the adoption of their child and now this same child who they have made so many

sacrifices for is turning their household upside down. Frequently the child may even physically injure other family members and is stretching parental tolerance and understanding to the limit. As Mary realizes, "It's difficult to love someone who draws blood from you and spits food in your face all day long".

Most often these feelings of attachment are expressed in terms of comparison to feelings for a birth child. The following story of a mother distinguishes the difference in feeling for children and describes how this difference manifests itself.

> My husband and I have always believed very strongly that love is a decision. And it's unconditional and when we took in (our adopted daughter) we took her in for better or worse and we'll love her. But the one thing that surprises me that I know, I hope that will change, that I'm not happy with is that I do not yet feel like she's mine. With (my son), when he hurts himself I physically hurt. And you probably know that too. When they're sick you just physically hurt with them. Or if somebody would ever dare to say something negative about them, over my dead body!. You know that maternal instinct that says, "He's mine!"... I do feel for her, that's not it, but it's not that over my dead body kind of love...
>
> Even when we go to bed, we both stand over both our children's cribs and we'll pray over them. And then we'll go to bed, when they are asleep already, and we'll pray over (our son) and my husband will tuck him in and give him a kiss and pull the blanket over him. And we'll go into (our adopted daughter's) room and we'll pray. And then my husband leaves the room. It's little things like that she doesn't know, but she will someday. And I see that (difference in feeling) in my husband too. He doesn't say it but I can see it. I go through the motions. I tuck her in, I give her a kiss and stroke her and she stirs a bit and I think, well she must

> know. But I could have just walked out of the room too. It's not intrinsically there, you know?

This difficulty bonding was disappointing and created guilt for parents.

> And I felt guilty that I was having these well, that I felt so annoyed with her. Even rationally I couldn't change it and I would say to myself, "You know you are being silly." But telling yourself is one thing and doing it is another.

Parents believed this lack of instantaneous love would be letting down the child and feared the child would recognize this difference of feeling on some level.

> And sometimes (on a bad day), she would turn around and want to smooge with me, and you know cuddle. And I would go through the motions because I knew that she needed that. And I know that my heart has to follow later but she needs me to cuddle and that's how we're going to get over this period. She needs to feel just as loved as (my son), but a lot of the time I'm doing the motions but I'm not doing the feelings. And she will be worse off here feeling unloved than she would ever have been in Romania. Cause there she wouldn't have known any different....That I can't live with, because she'll always feel the underdog. She'll always feel less.

They remain hopeful however, that the process of learning to love or bonding will be an ongoing one and therefore with time and more positive interaction with their child the feelings will grow.

> My emotions are coming but its not, I thought it would happen faster. But we'll give it more time. And I believe it will happen....
>
> I mean people say to me, " Well doesn't it bother you that your not bonded to them or that they're not bonding to you?" And I say, "Well not really. It's a process . It doesn't come over night. Relax and let it happen."

It is surprising for parents that they were having some problems with bonding since they had expected bonding difficulties to be on the part of the adopted child. They had been warned prior to the adoption that the Romanian children may be "incapable of forming attachments" due to their histories in the orphanages. They were prepared for that lack of attachment on behalf of the child, but not for their own difficulties. Again it was a conscious decision to care for their child and a conviction to their adoption decision that has aided these parents in dealing with the attachment difficulties.

> But don't expect that your child is going to respond to you, love you from the moment you brought it home. It doesn't happen. It doesn't happen that way and for some people that's very disappointing. When they would just as soon as go to anybody else in the crowd that's hard. Remember that the child you're getting is coming to you because he is abandoned and therefore he is damaged goods and you have to live with that. And make a conscious decision everyday to love this child despite what he does.

Optimism in the Future

The final theme is one of optimism and hope. Parents describe the progress their child and family has made over the course of the adjustment. Parents compared their adopted child's behavior at the time of the interview to that behavior immediately following the adoption and recognize that their adopted children have made large gains developmentally and exhibit fewer of the difficult behaviors described earlier. "There are so many more good

days than bad." Medical procedures have repaired several physical conditions and children have become more active and attentive as a result. Language skills have improved and children have an understanding of English and an ability to communicate more clearly. Most importantly for the parents is the sense of belonging or identification with the family the children appear to feel.

> People said to me "Did it take him very long to call you mamma?" But he had no concept of what a mom was. I could have told him to call me Fred and he would have called me Fred, you know. The association that we are special and that we have a special relationship is coming. When he looks forward to seeing me at the end of the school time, when he's sad because sometimes I leave him at school, that's a good thing because he knows I'm going to come back and we're building that trust cycle. And he needs to know where everyone is all the time. All the special people you know, the siblings and Dad.

> She wanders through this place like she's been here her whole life. That's good. We're really happy for that. We remember the day when that struck us that she had made this her home. And that was our thrill. We were so thrilled by that. And she knows who Mommy is and who Daddy is and that this is her home and she seems to be very content. That's the one thing that everybody says about her. They can see very, very clearly the contentment in her eyes. She's just so content within herself and that's happened over the time she's really settled. Her spirit has settled.

Parents also recognize personal growth, marital growth and family growth. They see the trials of the adoption process and adjustment period as having provided a situation in which they were forced to redefine themselves and parental roles. After emerging from these personal and family struggles intact, parents could identify the

positive growth, for themselves, their adopted child and their entire family. They can recognize their child's gifts.

> I'm so thrilled day after day about what she brought into our home. If you were going to make a check and balance, you know she makes a perfect playmate for my son. And they're learning how to fight and they're learning how to share all those things that playmates do. Her exuberance and what she's taught us about parenting, we were never stretched to that limit before. You know that really we are more complete because of her.
>
> (My adopted son) just livens things up around here. And (my adopted daughter) is so happy. She's happy with anything and she always was. It certainly shows you that even under her conditions to have that happy personality, to keep it intact is quite amazing. She's just happy, happy, happy all the time. Happy with anything. So they do have their contributions to this family and I like the way they've been with our son and that's one of the reasons we adopted was to have a sibling for our son and it's been really good for him. They have given him the experience he needed.

In spite of the assumption that children from Romanian institutions may be incapable of developing attachments or empathetic feelings parents have identified behavior in their children which would reflect development of those types of feelings. Ellen recognizes her adopted son's empathy for others as being his strength and his gift to the family.

> When (my birth son) fell off the bunk bed my parents were visiting and this was the first time they met (my adopted son). And (my adopted son) was nowhere in sight when this happened, and it was definitely (my birth son's) own fault. I mean as much as being an accident. My dad went in and picked up (my birth son) and laid him on the couch and (my adopted son) was

> running behind him saying, "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry for you," and rubbed his brother's back. And my Mom came into the kitchen and was crying and she said, "he feels so responsible for his brother." And that was a neat sign because of what my husband had seen in Romania. You know about the people there being so uncaring.

Besides the progress their children and families have made parents also recognize there will be future struggles and special needs related to the adoption. Up to this point parents have been able to find solutions to their difficulties, sometimes through trial and error and sometimes through the support of others. Problems which are anticipated in the future seem less threatening to parents since they have overcome so many obstacles already. They are prepared and at least now have an idea of what coping strategies or support systems are effective and available.

> (I anticipate a need), in terms of professional support, in the educational aspect. And for healing damaged emotions and for us in helping to deal with it because we try to cope with the "Star Trek Plan". You know going where no man has gone before. But we really are treading new waters and so I don't really know what's going to be in the future. So far the services have been great. I think now I know if you're going to have a child that needs it, there are really wonderful organizations, which we just found out about by luck.

Reflection on the adoption process and these difficulties with personal feelings have lead the parents to several profound insights of their experience and the meaning it has for them and others. The insights which have been discovered are unique to each parent as they are a result of a very personal process. When considering

that this is indeed a process, it is possible that all parents may come to similar conclusions over time. Some of these insights are religious in nature and therefore may be specific to those who come from this type of background. I leave you with those insights which have affected me and are worthy of consideration by many.

> You can't go into any of these, especially Romanian or the International Adoptions thinking you can save the world. Because then you get chewed up with the number of people you have to leave behind. You simply have to go in with the ability to affect the life of one person.... And as a result we're not helping just one person. We showed a community what could be done by ordinary people.
>
> We have no guarantees with any or our children. However with the birth children we had taken care of them to the best of our abilities from the moment I knew I was pregnant. And we took good care of our relationship, to show them that they are coming into a stable home. And so from the moment that they came to be with us, they have been in a loving home. And you know I wanted to provide everything for them in terms of emotional security. (Our adopted son) hasn't had that and I don't know how damaged he is by not having it. I don't know if he can catch up on it. He does press buttons in us that make us furious. Yet I hope that what we've been giving is enough. If not we've still done our best. I don't have the energy right now to forecast how this is going to turn out. But we just knew that it was the right thing for us to do.
>
> We can make decisions to be crippled or helped by situations . It's like that line in the movie "Steel Magnolias", everything that doesn't kill us helps make us strong.
>
> It doesn't matter how he came, if the stork brought him, if he was a full birth or blasted in. Each child is a gift. Our society is teaching us today that they're not worth that much. And you can just pay somebody else to take care of them or if you don't want it we'll

take care of that too. That puzzles me to no end. And this is our fight too. Our fight to show human dignity and the sanctity of life and the preciousness of us all, our Romanian child, and our three older children and this (adoption) is just a sign that God was taking care of him too....I said in the letter as yet we don't know what cost this child will be. We don't know the cost financially, emotionally, spiritually and physically but the cost is not that much considering what Christ has given for us.

V. Discussion and Conclusions

The experience tells itself and the insight and knowledge gained through listening has been enormous. It would be impossible to comment on every aspect of the experience nor is it necessary. However, comparisons of these findings to the literature will be made in order to develop a sense of what research might be beneficial in the future. There are also four specific findings which are as somewhat unique to the Romanian adoption experience and which need to be considered. As well, the input I received from the Romanian Adoption Support group will be discussed. Finally I welcome the opportunity to share my personal perceptions about the nature of Romanian adoption or for that matter any adoption. These may in fact be biases based upon this one research project, but have become of such importance to me that it is necessary I ask the reader to consider them.

A. Comparisons with the Literature

The themes of the interviews seem consistent with previous research. Parallels can be drawn between the research on institutional care and the orphanages of Romania (Lizano, 1982, Dennis and Najarian, 1957, Tizard and Hodges, 1978 and Mukhina 1989). The issues of loss and attachment appear to be a dominant area of concern in the literature (Berman and Bufferd, 1986, Anthony et al., 1989, Kagan and Reid, 1986, Robertson and Robertson, 1971, and

Wallerstein, 1983), and have emerged in the themes of this research as well. Included in the loss experience for these parents were the factors associated with the trip to Romania. Predictors of disruption and parental stress after adoption were noted by Ames (1992), Talen and Lehr (1984), Deering and Scahill (1989), and Schmidt (1988). These same types of stresses were identified by parents of this study to be areas which inhibit the transition of the adopted child into the family unit. The Hoffmann-Riem study (1986) on adoptive parenting and the norm of family emotionality mentions the desire of the adoptive parents to re-establish some sense of "normal" in the post adoptive home. This is also true for parents who have adopted Romanian children. One mother aptly jokes "The closest thing we'll ever find to "normal" in our home is the third button on the wash machine."

The Ames study from British Columbia on Romanian Adoption (1992), is by far the most closely related to the findings of this study. Within each of the areas her group studied; developmental progress, behavior and attachment problems, and parental experiences, findings were similar to those experienced by the parents of this study. This support from literature is reaffirming for me as a researcher, but seems unnecessary for the parents who have agreed that what has been described was indeed their experience. They did not rely on the literature to recognize their experience but have found some comfort and

support in realizing they are not alone in dealing with the difficulties associated with adoption.

B. A Highlight of Four Unique Findings

Besides the themes which have already been described there are four elements of the experience of Romanian adoption which need to be highlighted. Though these may be true for other adoptive experiences, they play a major role in the decisions and adjustments surroundings Romanian adoption. In all cases the points were of particular importance to the parents and contributed to the emotions described in the themes recognized as descriptive of the experience.

Dissatisfaction with Provincial Adoption Services

Parents continually described the overall dissatisfaction with adoption services available in Alberta. They were discouraged from adopting, treated with complacency and general indifference which added to the stress and frustration they experienced with the legalities of adoption. Travelling to Romania and adopting a child with undetermined developmental delays was preferable for Mary and Beth to the adoption alternatives available in Alberta. This in itself is very descriptive of how little faith they had in the ability of the provincial system to find them a child.

There was little mention of this dissatisfaction and frustration with services in other studies. The only study which describes a issue which may be related to this dissatisfaction is the Ames study (1992). It identifies one of the major reasons parents choose to adopt from Romania was the lack of availability of children in British Columbia, and parents doubted they would ever be able to adopt provincially. Whether or not this pessimism regarding the likelihood of adopting in British Columbia reflects a dissatisfaction with provincial services in unclear.

Greater than Expected Developmental Delays

All parents were surprised at the severity of developmental delays of their adopted children. Even though they had been told by several people what to expect they had not anticipated it would be "that bad". This lead to feeling inadequate since they believed they would be able to handle any situation their adopted child might create. As Mary describes, "I thought love would be enough. Now I'm really learning about tough love."

Again the Ames study (1992) identifies the British Columbian parents as having that same feeling. This has implications for the seminars given to prepare parents for adoption. Perhaps a discussion lead by parents who have previously adopted Romanian children would more clearly

communicate the difficulties associated with adopting institutionalized children.

Negative Experience of Romania

Mary, Beth and Adam all left Romania with a negative view of the political, economic and social conditions of the country. This has effected their overall experience of adoption as they needed time to resolve their personal losses suffered by living in Romania. Clearly it was the pain associated with their adoption processes which encouraged them to become involved in this research project, and much of that pain was related to the experience of Romania. This is important to note. The parents willingness to participate in this study because of their painful experiences has given a specific view to Romanian adoption. Different experiences have been noted in the discussion with the Romanian Support Group.

Attachment processes have been influenced by these negative experiences. For Adam and Mary it was difficult to separate the pain of Romania from their adopted children. Each time Mary looked at her adopted child she recalled the personal losses suffered as a result of her trip to Romania. Adam frequently stressed the need to separate his personal losses from his adopted child, since he feared resenting the child. Obviously this becomes a barrier to establishing secure attachment between parent and child. The Ames study (1992) also notes parents were

not emotionally prepared for the conditions of Romania which added to the overall stress they experienced throughout the adoption. It did not however describe any relationship between these experiences and parental attachment.

Parental Attachment

All the parents described being surprised and perhaps disappointed because they did not have an immediate loving feeling for their adopted child. They had anticipated any difficulties with attachment to be on the part of the child. I have found very little research based upon parental attachment, and what there is generally relates to disrupted adoptions. The comparison of attachment which is constantly being made by parents and researchers is the attachment between parent and adopted child to parent and birth child. What may be implied is that if a adoptive parent does not love an adopted child as they would a birth child, then the relationship is in some respect a failure. It is interesting that the marker of successful attachment for the parents I interviewed would be the feeling that the adopted child was like one of their own.

C. Considerations From A Romanian Adoption Support Group

Upon sharing the findings with a Romanian adoption support group there were some variation in stories and therefore the tone of one of the themes was different. The theme Living the Culture described an experience which was most significantly experienced by the parents I interviewed and not nearly as prominent for others. Keep in mind that the parents of this study selected themselves based on these negative experiences and therefore as mentioned earlier may have a unique view of Romanian adoption.

The difference in experiences was focused on the helplessness, hopelessness and powerlessness of living in the country. Although all who travelled to Romania experienced frustration with the differences between the Canadian and Romanian social, economic and political conditions, not all left the country with the impression of Romania which was described earlier. Some parents had such pleasant experiences that they look forward to the day they can return to Romania and perhaps begin the adoption process again.

I believe the difference in emotional experiences is related to four different elements of the cultural experience. The first was the length of time spent in Romania. Mary, Adam and Beth were forced to remain in Romania for eight weeks or more had a negative experience of the country. Other parents of the support group who

were there for only a short period left with more positive feelings. The second element of the experience was the number of people the parents travelled with. Generally the parents of the support group who went only with their spouse had a more pleasant experience of the country than Mary, Beth and Adam, who had travelled with a large group and had left birth children and spouses in Canada. As a group in Romania they encountered more problems with the political system because they were attempting to get a greater number of processes accomplished. As the group gained cohesiveness they shared in each others losses which increased the overall loss experiences associated with Romania.

The third difference in experience was based on the area of Romania the parents stayed. Mary, Beth and Adam who lived in rural areas describe very impoverished conditions and a greater sense of helplessness exhibited by the people who lived there. Finally the willingness of parents to use money in the form of bribes to move the process of adoption along greatly effected the emotion associated with the experience. Mary, Beth and Adam, who chose not to use money to speed the process, were forced to wait and became frustrated and helpless by the slowness and lack of control over the process. Their experience was more like that of a Romanian citizen who was without the financial means to change their predicament.

It is this one theme, Living The Culture, which was not completely accepted by the parents of the Support Group. They did however recognize the uniqueness of Romania and the problems faced by Canadian parents who needed to work within the political and social systems in order to adopt a child. Parents of the support group acknowledged every other theme as true to their experience of Romanian adoption. It was very satisfying for me to see the parents validating each others experiences, and taking comfort in knowing they were not alone.

D. Recommendations

I leave this research project with great personal satisfaction in knowing the parents acknowledge the themes as true to their experience. I have the greatest respect and admiration for their willingness to share their stories of both anguish and joy. It is with some regret that I discuss the following recommendations because they reflect a need which I had hoped did not exist. I do accept that these recommendations are based on my personal experience of this research project and therefore may be biased. Perhaps my personal challenge will be to find exceptions for each of the areas I identify as lacking.

The first of these is related to the behavioral problems of the Romanian children. Parents repeatedly described the lack of concrete or practical information provided by any source regarding what parental practices

might be effective in dealing with the unusual behaviors They were constantly consulting with doctors, social workers, educational specialists, and psychologists who all admittedly were as perplexed by the behaviors as the parents. The greatest support was provided by other parents who had adopted and who, by simple luck and perseverance, had discovered a way in which to deal with some behaviors. There is an obvious need for more specialists in the area of Romanian adoption, and at the very least better communication is needed between those government support services involved in adoption. Having stressed this point of establishing better communication, I feel it is appropriate to mention that parents found "time out" to be the most effective tool in dealing with undesirable behavior from children.

The second issue is just one element of a larger problem. Every adoptive parent I have spoken to throughout this entire process expressed frustration with Alberta's present system of adoption. This frustration was mainly a result of the slowness of the process and the attitudes of the people who are in control of this process. At times when parents compared the Canadian and Romanian adoption systems, they recognized that Alberta's system is in some ways more "backwards" than Romania which is politically, economically and socially impaired. This does not speak well of a service put in place to uphold the protection and welfare of children, especially in a province as wealthy as

ours. Parents describe being "put off" by those involved in the process and being treated with little respect or regard for the emotional intensity of the adoption experience.

It is difficult for me to understand the reasons behind this attitude of nonchalance and disregard for adoptive parents. Couples seeking adoption are considered to be consumers of a commodity which is in great demand. Because of this they are not treated with the respect deserving of their contribution to the welfare of an abandoned or orphaned child. Adoptive parents provide a valuable service to our province and should be considered a wonderful resource. They are willing to undergo trying processes and much personal sacrifice to bring a child into their home. Instead of being recognized as caretakers of our most valuable provincial treasure, our children, parents are told to take a number and wait in line while the provincial system juggles laws and lives in an all to often political battle.

Perhaps this treatment is merely a reflection of a societal attitude. How do I as a non-adoptive parents regard adoption? Do I need to acknowledge a child as being adopted or constantly question parents' ability to love an adopted child "as their own"? Even adoptive parents experience great guilt in recognizing a different type of love for their adopted child and birth child. If adoptive parents make the distinction between loving a birth child

or loving an adopted child, I am faced with a need to compare, and comparison often leads to "good" and "better" types of choices. Does this mean adoption is not "as good as" having a birth child?

The more important question should be why do I need to compare the love for an adopted child to the love for a birth child? The adoption relationship is different than any other, especially in older child adoptions, and to admit that I might love an adopted child in a unique way should not be incriminating for the parent or child. Avoiding honesty in any relationship is to say I am not convinced our love is strong enough to withstand the truth. The truth is, adoption is unique and the adoptive relationship has its own special needs and gifts. But it works. Adoption can be every bit as wonderful or painful as all other human relationships. It is time we let go of all the stereotypes and limitations associated with what adoption is not; that is becoming a family by giving birth. It is time we accept adoption for exactly what it is, the sharing of lives between people who need and want each other. When this happens we will truly have entered a day in which the love for a child surpasses all boundaries, and all children can be loved by parents.

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Appendix A. Romanian Adoption Questionaire

Demographic Information.

You

Name:_____ Age:

Address:_____ Race:_____

_____ Religion:_____

Cultural Heritage:

Phone: _____ _____

Educational Background:_____ Occupation:_____

_____

Spouse

Name:_____ Age:_____

Race:_____ Religion:_____

Cultural Heritage:_____

Educational Background:_____ Occupation:_____

_____

Number of years married:_____

Birth Children

Name:_____Age:_____Sex:_____

Name:_____Age:_____Sex:_____

Name:_____Age:_____Sex:_____

Name:_____Age:_____Sex:_____

Adopted Child

Name:_____Age(in months)____ Sex:___

Age at adoption(months): _____

Place of birth:_____

Cultural Heritage:_____

Birth Weight:_____Length of Pregnancy:___

Born in a hospital or at home? _____

Any pregnancy or labour difficulties that you know of?

_____

Was your child placed in an orphanage, foster home, or hospital?

_____

How long did he/she remain there? _____

Can you describe the conditions there? _____

_____

What do you know about the birth parents/history?

What do they know about you?

Do you have any medical concerns regarding your child's health or development? If so what?

A. Decision to Adopt.

1. Why did you decide to adopt?

2. How long was it from the time you decided to adopt until you obtained your child?

3. Why did you chose a Romanian child?

4. Was this your final option?

5. Did you know anything about Romanian culture when you decided to adopt? If so, what?

6. What was your greatest fear about adopting a Romanian child?

7. How did others react to you when they heard of your decision?

8. Did you have any specific requirements for a child?

B. Adoption Process.

1. Who was the first person you contacted in beginning your adoption search? What did they tell you?

2. How long did it take you to find a support person or agency who put a definite plan into action for you? Who was it?

3. In assisting you in the Romanian adoption process how helpful were
   a. Social Services?
   b. Canadian Immigration?
   c. Canadian Embassy staff in Bucharest and Belgrade?

4. What help did you have with the Romanian side of the adoption process? i.e. courts, orphanages, hospitals, or medical services.

5. Briefly describe the process you went through in finding and adopting your child.

6. What was the most difficult experience you went through during this period?

7. Approximately how long did it take for you from the time the Romanian adoption process began until your child was in your home.

8. How much did it cost you to adopt your child? Do you know what this money was used for? Can you specify these expenses? Did you go into debt to pay expenses?

9. Did you have any ethical concerns about what this money was being used for? Any ethical concerns about the adoption?

C. Family Preparation.

1. What did you and your family `imagine' your child would be like?

2. How did you prepare your home and immediate family for the coming of your child? Were you prepared emotionally, spiritually and physically when your child arrived?

3. Was there anything special you did in preparing your home because your child was from Romania?

4. Did you tell your friends (neighbors) you were thinking about adopting from Romania? What was their reaction?

5. Did anyone try to talk you out of adopting a Romanian child? If so, who?

6. Was there an outside person (agency) that helped you to prepare your home and family?

7. What else (in retrospect) might you have done to ease the adjustment of your family and yourself?

D. Bonding / Attachment Issues

1. How did your adopted child initially adapt to the new home? How did you adapt to a child in your life/home?

2. Were there any specific behaviors such as rocking, head banging, hitting, or feeding difficulties that caused you concern? Any other behaviors that worried you?

3. How did you cope with these behaviors? Who did you talk to? Any suggestions that might help others?

4. Did your child chose any particular person or object to become more attached to? If so who or what? Any ideas why?

5. Describe your child's initial ability to:
   a) smile, interact and react
   b) hug or kiss
   c) being held
   d) interact with members outside the family

How long did it take before you noticed changes in these behaviors?

6. What were the reactions (positive and negative) of your children, parents, friends to the adoption?

7. What was your family physicians reaction to the of your child?

8. What were the most difficult issues you had to deal with during this adjustment period? How did you deal with these?

9. Do you believe in the future your child should know about his/her birth family and culture?

10. Do you believe your child should know he/she is adopted? If so at what age and how will you tell him/her?

E. Family Adjustment Presently.

1. How long has this child lived in your home (in months)? Do you feel he/she is bonding? Why or why not? Are you?

2. Describe your adopted child today? What are his/her strengths? What are his/her limitations?

3. Is your child different than you imagined him/her to be? In what ways? Does this bother you?

4. How does your child get along with other children/ adults?

5. How has your relationship with your spouse changed since the adoption?

6. Do you believe there is a difference between an adopted Romanian child's ability to bond and an adopted Canadian child's ability to bond? If so what is this difference?

7. What special needs (other than those already mentioned) does your child have?

8. What special `gifts' does your child bring to your family?

9. Do you have any regrets about this adoption? If so what are they? Would you adopt from Romania again? If so, how soon? Do you wish you would have adopted another child at the same time?

10. What advice would you give to a couple who were planning to adopt a child from Romania?

F. Support Services.

1. What support services did you find helpful during the adoption process?

2. What support services are needed?

3. In what areas do you anticipate a need for support services in the future? i.e. as your child gets older.

4. Would you be willing to be part of a follow-up interview in one to three years?

5. Any other information you would like to share?

6. Before you began this adoption process, would a course in what to expect in Romanian Adoption have been helpful with issues such as health, and physical and emotional development?

7. Would you appreciate receiving a summary report of this research?

Appendix B. Letter to Parents with Summary of Themes

Dear

My apologies for not contacting you sooner about the progress of my research. I have enjoyed a break from studies over the summer and consequently the research went on hold.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation in the project. I can't begin to explain to you the insight you have given me into your experience. Your honesty and deep personal reflection provided an entire new element to my research which aided in my understanding of previous and subsequent interviews. Each time I read through our interview I was struck by something new. Your gifts of insight and humor have made my experience of learning enjoyable and far more worthwhile than I had ever expected.

Not all of the parents interviewed described the same type of experience but there were definitely similarities among the stories. After slowly going over our interview several times I have pulled out the major themes which were reiterated throughout.

It is very important to me that I have accurately recounted your story and focused on the themes which were of significance to you. For this reason I have enclosed a copy of the transcript of our interview and summary of the major themes extracted from it. I would appreciate any comments you might have about the accuracy of the transcription or the themes. As well please feel free to include other stories or new elements of the experience which you feel will be beneficial to the research. These comments may be made on the spaces provided and returned to me by mail or if you'd rather and can afford the time I would love to meet with you again and get your input. As an outsider looking in I want to be sure that the story I'm telling rings true for you.

I will be contacting you again by telephone in a few days and am looking forward to your reaction and input. Thanks again for your involvement in this research. I consider you to be a co-researcher in this endeavor as I would not have come this far without your willingness to participate.

Sincerely,

Sandra Brenneis

Summary of Themes

There are several ways to consider the stories of Romanian adoption. I have chosen to view it in terms of what stage of the process it pertains to. Since the tone of the themes greatly depends upon the time in the process, it was necessary to divide the information into a type of beginning, middle and end. The first stage of the process reflects those decisions and events which lead to making the decision of adoption and the choice of a Romanian child. The second stage describes the actual experience of Romania. The final stage is based upon the adjustment period following the return home from Romania with a child and the present insights and reflections about the entire adoption process. Not every part of the process fits into a certain theme or category and thus what follows is a description of the major themes involved in each of these stages.

Part 1. The decision to Adopt

Frustration and Uncertainty

Most parents were motivated to adopt because of a desire for another child. For some there were complications with conception or pregnancy, and for others parents preferred the addition of an older child to the family rather than an infant. A few parents were motivated because of the situation in Romania and felt their family had something to offer to a child institutionalized there

as well as recognizing the gifts an adopted child could bring to their family.

Adoption avenues in Alberta presented several difficulties and obstacles. Support services in this area tended to discourage the types of adoption parents were seeking. Friends, employers and some family members also expressed disapproval for parents choice to go to Romania and feelings of frustration and uncertainty prevailed. Also contributing to these feelings was unfamiliarity with the adoption process and therefore difficulties in deciding what action should or could be taken to speed the process.

Hope

The opportunity to adopt from Romania presented itself as a viable and very desirable option. Although there was some concern about the physical health of a Romanian child parents recognized this opportunity as one which allowed them to find the child they were looking for. As well they were no longer forced to wait for the provincial system to find a child for their family. For other parents the opportunity to adopt from Romania was a chance to do something to make a difference in the life of just one child. This was seen as responding to a global concern in the most personal of ways. This became a time of hopefulness and excited anticipation for the future.

God and Faith.

God's involvement in the events during this period was viewed as making the seemingly impossible, possible. At times there were circumstances which may have been serious roadblocks to the successful journey to Romania, but in most cases some turn of events or unanticipated action of others lead the parents to believe that this adoption was as much God's decision as their own. The adoption of a Romanian child was viewed as God's will and by following this path parents were remaining faithful to the will of God as well as meeting their own needs to find a child or grow personally and as a family.

Once parents made this choice they remained committed to following through and tackled situations of uncertainty by having faith that God would do His part in making their decision possible. Even though parents were not convinced that God's will was for them to find a child in Romania they were sure that it was part of the design that the trip should be made. They were prepared to take the risks involved based on their strong faith and commitment.

Part II: The Journey

Living the Culture

The predominant theme of the experience of Romania was related to the values and existence of the Romanian people. The living conditions of the people were described as well as the conditions of the orphanages. The culture was described as one of helplessness, hopelessness and

powerlessness. The difficulties experienced were a consequence of the parents evaluating the political, social and economic systems of Romania by Canadian Standards. Not only were the physical necessities of life lacking but the Romanian people had been robbed of the liberties which nurture the human spirit. The result was a people who were incapable of controlling any aspect of their life because efforts seemed futile. This resignation of control to the people of power seemed engrained in generation after generation of Romania's people. It was most apparent for parents when attempting to deal with the Romanian political and social systems, and they found themselves also having little control over the adoption process.

After spending several weeks in this hopeless existence Canadian parents themselves accepted the helplessness as inevitable and became victims of the country. They were also forced to rely on the people of power in Romania who exercised their authority in what ever manner they chose, sometimes unpredictably and at random. Parents described several instances in which they had no choice but to rely on the unreliable judgement of corrupt judges, guards, and public service workers. This experience of living in Romania impacted the parents to a greater extent then they had anticipated, and recollections of the experience continued to bring back unpleasant physical and emotional responses. This is a very significant point in the process of adoption as it

influenced parents' reactions to and understandings of their adopted children's behavior in both a negative and positive manner.

Loss

During the experience of living in Romania parents suffered several losses. Most obvious was the separation from their spouses and birth children who remained in Canada. As well jobs had been given up in order to pursue the adoption and to remain in Romania for such an extended period of time. Canadian women who went to Romania lost their freedom and power as in the Romanian culture women are not considered to be equal to men and most often remain in very traditional roles. For this reason Canadian women were restricted in the places they were able to travel.

Other parents expressed frustration at the loss of ability to communicate with the people of Romania because of the language difference. They were forced to rely on translators who frequently did not completely or clearly communicate what was being said. There was also financial loss to the family who incurred great expenses to travel to Romania, however this seemed to be of secondary importance in comparison to other losses.

The prolonged stay in Romania also brought about a loss of confidence in parents own ability to get things done. They frequently felt that situations were beyond their control. The Romanian attitudes of helplessness and hopelessness began to become a part of the Canadian parents

belief and resulted in their own inability to complete tasks in the time they had expected to. Loss of control, loss of hope, and loss of time with family members at home were the most significant elements of this stage of the story.

For the spouse who remained in Canada during the adoption process there were also feelings of loss. Separation from the spouse was complicated by having to assume the role of sole caretaker for other children. Inability to communicate with the partner in Romania made it difficult to be aware of what stage the process was at and there were great feelings of uncertainty and discouragement.

Part III: Adjustment

Chaos

The first few months of adjustment with the new family member has been described as one of chaos and uncertainty. Physical ailments and developmental delays kept parents guessing and searching for new means of coping. Unusual behaviors and reactions were difficult to deal with since accepted Canadian parenting practices had little effect in initiating change. The birth children of the adoptive parents also had difficulty adjusting as their once "normal" family had been upset by the addition of an unpredictable new member.

Coping

During this adjustment stage there were several elements parents had to cope with. Most obviously were the unusual behaviors of the adopted children and their physical and emotional needs. Siblings needed time to readjust to the family unit as well as overcome fears that the parent who had been gone for several weeks would leave again. Extended family members needed to learn what was acceptable behavior from the new child and how they could support parents. Reactions from friends and neighbors was generally positive but occasionally parents were confronted with outsiders who had difficulty with either the decision to adopt a Romanian child or the behaviors of the child. Parents also had difficulty finding professional support people who were familiar with unusual physical conditions and behaviors of their children.

Parents were generally on their own when it came to developing coping strategies. Of greatest support to them were the other members of the group who had gone to Romania seeking adoption. Perceptions of parenting abilities changed and a new type of love was learned, one which required perseverance and dedication. Parents were faced with endless challenges from their adopted child and sometimes it was only their commitment to the decision to adopt that kept them going.

*Those parents who recognized God as having a role in their adoption experience also turned to Him for support during

these coping difficulties. His role was seen as significant in providing parents with the necessary skills and strength to overcome these obstacles.

Unexpected Feelings and Insights

When entering into the decision to adopt most parents were not prepared for the magnitude of feelings they would have. One of the most prominent feelings resulted from the experience of Romania and the association of this experience with their child. In most cases it helped parents to understand the behaviors of their child, recognizing that the situations they had come from greatly effected their reactions to people, places, water, food and objects. However in some cases their child became a reminder of the feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and loss which were experienced in Romania. As well parents were having difficulty with the destruction of their previous family unit and the struggles of adjustment. The result was a different type of feeling for the child then they had anticipated. Frustration, fear, pain and anger made it difficult to instantly love the child as they had expected.

The way parents feel for their adopted child is most often described by comparison with a birth child. The feelings for the birth child are described as extremely intense, protective and almost instinctual. The adopted child is loved and cared for but not to the same degree as the birth child. For some parents there is pain,

disappointment and sometimes guilt in recognizing the feelings and attachment for this child has not been as instantaneous as expected. Other parents believe that bonding is a long process and that time is the essential factor in developing deeper feelings for their adopted children.

Optisism for the Future

The final theme is one of optimism and hope. Parents describe the progress their child and family has made over the course of adjustment. They recognize personal growth, marital growth and family growth brought by the new family member. They are able to see past the pain of the struggles and recognize the gifts their child has brought to the family. As well there is belief that their decision was indeed the "right" one and that the love they feel for their child will continue to grow. They look to the future and identify what support systems their family and children may need in terms of education, physical development and psychological and emotional growth. They express dedication to and optimism for the journey that lies ahead.